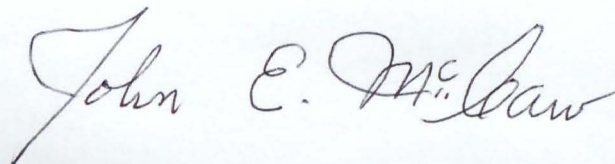


From the Pulpit To The Street

Sermons

by

John Emory McCaw

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "John E. McCaw". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the printed name.

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Introduction

These sermons were originally recorded in churches around and in Des Moines Iowa. From the recorded sermons I have selected 36 to be included. This necessitated converting them from analog into the computer from whence they have been sent to transcribers. Since the sermons were preached extemporaneously from notes there are no paragraphs or punctuation obvious in the recordings. The give-and-take between the preacher and the congregation disappears. However one can still get a sense of the word pictures the preacher was trying to paint. Indeed each phrase, each clause was used as the strokes of the brush to construct a bridge of communication between the speaker and the audience over which ideas, expectations, advice, chastisement, encouragement and much else could flow. The speaker by being sensitive to the response of the audience benefited in ways that affected his total ministry among the people particularly in a pastoral sense.

The author of the sermons chose not to preach from his own orthodoxy or lack of it but rather to speak with in the context of the biblical belief of the particular congregation in which he was ministering. From the theological base of the congregation the preacher moved as rapidly as possible into the "social gospel" or application of the teaching from the Bible to everyday contemporary life. Few if any societies have yet to approach even the ancient ideal espoused in the "Bible".

However, each new era and particularly the scientific era of the present day brings new evidences of human greed, bullying and particularly addiction. The interconnectivity of the computer age not only equips and emboldens the "ordinary person" but also entices hackers and financiers and even small nations to have an undue negative influence on the possibility of developing a world society that is peaceful, truthful, conserving, healthy and contained.

Who cannot but be inspired by the preaching of John of Antioch; the Friars, Francis and Dominic. In later times, John Wesley, William Booth, Charles Drummond, Charles Finney, Peter Cartwright, Dwight Moody, Walter Rauschenbusch and Harry Fosdick. The preacher today must prophetically build his sermons out of the human past in order to enable the human present to become the "kingdom" to which humanity aspires hopefully before humanity, itself, expires.

Nations that receive their revenue from the addictions of their citizens will find themselves unable to find enough persons to responsibly carry out multiple duties to enable commerce, communication, education, health, agronomy, industry, etc., etc, etc, because the citizenry is so handicapped by the very addiction's promoted by its society. Within those addictions should also be included athletic extravaganzas and many presentations to be found in movie theaters and even the legitimate theater. I predict, if not in my lifetime but within the next 50 years, the United States of America will feel on this land the devastation wrought by drones and atomic bombs. I predict also within the next 50 years with the rapid growth of population much of the lands of the world will be inundated and much of the so called freshwater on which human beings depend will be polluted. **That is, unless the churches and religious gatherings" with other sensitized groups can develop a leavening of persons who can withstand the call to addictions and develop a more pure lifestyle and lead the masses away from the self damnation sure to come.**

Dedication

This book of sermons is dedicated to Maxine Mae Gambs McCaw, my companion of 71 years. As an only child she wanted a family of at least four children so that they could give each other companionship throughout their lives. Her bloodline came from Alsace Lorraine, Bavaria, and Holland. She was an avid pursuer of genealogy and a writer of memoirs. She was responsible for many of my better ideas and in her way more than once persuaded me to say or do things differently.

She was very cosmopolitan and at Curtis Institute of Music she shared classes with Leonard Bernstein and others of his stature. Recognized for her talent as well as her beauty of soul and body she was embraced by many including Martin Luther King, Rudolph Ganz and Aaron Copeland,

She set her feet on ground from Barrow, Alaska to the Yucatán from Seattle to San Francisco to San Diego to New Orleans to Miami to Chicago to New York to Paris to Madrid to Rome to Geneva to Paris, Amsterdam and London. including Moscow where she was recognized as a member of the Gambs family, makers of fine furniture now in the Kremlin, the Hermitage, and the Summer Palace. She set her feet also in Kiev, St. Petersburg, Irkutsk, as well as Beijing, Shanghai, Hong Kong and her birth place City of Des Moines as well as the towns and countryside of Iowa..

She was the ultimate Mother, four children by natural childbirth and each one nursed until weaning. She agonized as she called for the best medical attention when sickness came to dwell with any family member. Her fingers, so talented on the piano, also moved on any keyboard as fast I could talk as we carved out sermons, papers, lectures and books. The whole collaboration also received the benefit of the criticism of an excellent mind.

A year ago, January 26, 2013 she made her last journey. I'm thankful for the 71 years of love, support, loyalty and four children she bestowed upon me. This book of sermons is dedicated to the one who still lives on in our love and memories.

About the Author John Emory McCaw was born March 10, 1917, the first son of Clayton and Mildred Phillips McCaw, both ordained to the ministry of the Christian Church Disciples of Christ. Some of his first years were spent with his missionary parents in the Philippine Islands. He received his training for the ministry from Drake University in Des Moines Iowa and the Divinity school of University of Chicago. He served as executive secretary of the Iowa Christian Endeavor Society, director of the Inter-church Council of the University of Chicago, founder and director of the Student Cristian Foundation of Southern Illinois University, Director of student work for the Christian Church, as Dean of the Divinity school of Drake University and professor religion in the College of Liberal arts. He served for eight years on the Board of Education of the Des Moines Public Schools as well as serving on many committees and commissions in civic life. He received many recognitions and honors among them : Valedictorian and distinguished alumnus Lincoln High; Eta Sigma Phi , Phi Beta Kappa, distinguished *alumnus* Drake University ; honorary D.D degree from Christian Theological Seminary at Butler University, Fellow of Union Theological seminary. He received two ATS grants, the first to make a study of the "Role of the Theological Faculties in the Universities of North America and Europe and the second, "Roman Catholic and Protestant Relations in the United States with Special Reference to the National Council of Churches." He has written and given many papers and lectures including two historical novels, magazine articles, poetry and sayings.

Thank you! The "too many to name" who have helped to complete this project.



Maxine and John

Broken Heart
Covenant Christian Church
April 12, 1987

Scripture: Matthew 26: 36-46

Two millennia ago, the circumstances were such in the Mediterranean world, particularly in the area of Palestine that people were very much aware of the military. The whole area was dominated by the presence of the military. Soldiers in uniform on the streets, in garrisons scattered about the city with horse-drawn chariots going back and forth and messengers with various responsibilities going through the military maintained roads. It was occupied territory, occupied by forces loyal to Rome. With that went resistance and with that resistance there were terrorists, and assassins, and there were those who were constantly plotting for ways to overthrow the vassal rulers. Let the Romans show any sort of weakness or not paying attention someone would move into the vacuum and create a disturbance. In addition, there was conscription and forced labor to serve the causes of the dominant government. Wars and rebellions were constantly breaking out.

Furthermore, it was a period of economic exploitation. There were high interest rates. There were all sorts of processes indulged in so that one might seize the property of others and particularly of the poor and the widowed. In that day, there were manipulations by which one could be dispossessed of their rightful possessions. Accusations could be made and persons thrown into prison finding themselves in a circumstance of having to practically give up all of their accumulated wealth in order to buy and bribe to get themselves out of that condition. There were also religious leaders who were getting rich and living high on the hog and not wanting anyone to rock the boat. This was particularly true in Jerusalem. The leaders were concerned that some agitators among them might go too far.

What should we say about family life? It was deteriorating. In the Mediterranean world there was divorce, abandonment and selling of children, particularly girl children. Female infants were a drug on the market. There was infanticide, the killing of excess babies. In the very enlightened city of Athens, if a child was born not quite perfect there was outside the walls of the city a particular hill where such infants were exposed and where the wild animals would come down and consume them. There were those who exploited the practice. There were women who would go out and look over these infants and pick the ones they thought would be most hideous and maybe even go further and break limbs to create greater distortion, raise them until they were old enough, place them around the streets of Athens (as was practiced in other places) to beg, pitifully crying for alms. Then to be taken back at night, abused, fed very little, and what they made was taken away. There were other practices such as pederasty. (The love of men for boys.)

There was famine. There was famine particularly after drought. Food shortages drove people to riot. Rome tried mightily to send ships laden with grain to various parts of the empire in order to keep things quiet. North Africa, and southern France were among the chief granaries. There was bad agricultural practice, so much so that depletion of top soil turned many of these areas into deserts. One could go on and on.

What should we say about the politics of that day? There was corruption in office. There was blame for judges. There was nepotism, that is, the bringing of family members into positions of prominence when one received power. There was lavish living. All sorts of diversion from duty, which actually brought about indifference by those who governed about the plight of those who were governed. Into those conditions so briefly described was born a person who grew up to be Jesus of Nazareth. One of our difficulties in understanding this person is to move from a theological understanding of him which you have inherited as son of God, as a part of the Trinity, and to see this person as a human being.

I would have you think about Jesus as a human being. For failure to think about him as a human being destroys the necessity of his death about which we are thinking now. Jesus as a human being was born and grew up at a time when he could not avoid all the pressures surrounding him. But basically, if you study his teachings, he was very optimistic. Very optimistic about human potential. Somehow we must realize that Jesus had hopes for human possibilities.

He began by teaching. He hoped by teaching and illustrating the better way, the better way of personal integrity, the better way that can come about by a person loving God completely. Also loving one's neighbor as oneself. In fact, loving one's friend to the point of giving one's life. No greater love does one have for another than to give of his life. Jesus had high hopes that beginning particularly with those who were hurt most, the poor, the simple people, the outcasts, those most abused by the system, that if they could be redeemed by being lifted into positive living and thinking and depending upon love of one another, that somehow or another he could bring in a new life and a new age and a new culture. The new order would become contagious and it would spread. So he went about doing good. Showing to people the power that comes when one lets God control one's life. Jesus as a human being had high hopes for his fellows.

To say that he was expecting as a divine entity to die from the beginning of his ministry, as I indicated, is to threaten his humanity. For if Jesus was born knowing that he could never accomplish anything in his ministry and his preaching, and that the only way it could be accomplished was by dying, it would really give a lie to everything that he did. For the person who died was

a real human being who had tried so hard for several years with his fellows to teach the way of love and the way of peace. He was not prepared for the stubborn resistance and chronic sinfulness of human beings. He felt if he could but live and speak and show them the better way they would follow.

Instead, these people came for free meals, for healing spectacles and religious debates. Very few of them really seemed to have the power to let go and let God take over their lives. Even before the last trip to Jerusalem he had become aware that by reason and persuasion it was not going to happen. He came to the conclusion that he would have to give his life.

So on this last week that we celebrate now, we see the breaking of a heart. He put on a bright front and came to Jerusalem for the last time, yet his heart was breaking. Yet he perceived the hunger of the people for a leader to free them from Roman bondage as they smiled and waved. He said hello to friends and enquired, "How is the little boy, how is the blind beggar, how is the paralytic?" As they drew near to Jerusalem and saw that city his heart broke and he wept, saying "Even today you do not the things that made for peace, the things that I have been teaching, but no, they are hidden from your eyes."

We must realize the pathos, the emotional pressure on that man as he came to the realization that his ministry was not going to be enough to be effective. To bring people at last to turnabout from their condition which was so self-perpetuating and bring in a new way of living with one another was his hope. As he got to Jerusalem and made one last effort he finally concluded, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to you, how often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wing and you would not."

Do you feel that power and do you feel that torment? One last time as an optimistic human being he hoped and he prayed that the people would come to on their own. So he went to the garden of Gethsemane saying to his followers that my soul is sorrowful even unto death and there he prayed almost a last chance prayer, "My father, if it be possible this cup pass from me, help these people to turnabout on their own. Nevertheless, if it is not going to happen I am willing to be condemned as an agitator. So he made his peace and realized that as a human being he would have to be sacrificed. The human Jesus gave in to the divine within him and from then on he accepted the awesome responsibility of being a sacrifice for the stubborn sinfulness of humanity. The divine was in Jesus leading him to give himself as a sacrifice of love.

Today, we remember this sacrifice of long ago. As we look at our lives, if we take the description of the situation in Jesus' time and use it at this time does it not fit today? Do we not have the same problems, even more so? Have we

not multiplied their intensity in terms of our own technology and uninformed and misinformed thinking? But with all of our great advances, we have not advanced away from the depths of our sinfulness. So we do not just remember long ago, instead we would remember and acknowledge that as Jesus comes to our city this week, where will we be? Will we be out cheering him, and giving him hope that at the last minute we will reform and turn away from the kind of life that we seem to be sponsoring even in this great United States of America? Or do we break his heart and, at the week's end, be shouting, "Crucify him! crucify him!" You say, "No, I wouldn't do that." But, my friends, every time we take a step, do a deed, or fail to take a step or do a deed which says no to the evil of the day, we are crucifying Christ. Every time we let down in terms of our human and family relationships, in terms of our job, in terms of the kind of vocation we seek and express ourselves in, particularly if it is involved in the weaknesses of our fellows, we are crucifying Christ. Every time we fail to live up to the standards of our profession that we are trained for, every time we let the almighty dollar come in and made to be more important than the human element, my friends, every time we do not hear the cries of the poor and say, "Oh, the agencies will take care of them," or say, "Well, they are that way, if they just had more ambition." Every time we insulate ourselves from evil, and then wake up and say, after it's happened to us, "Why didn't somebody do something about this?" Every time we are in that condition we crucify Christ. For you see when Jesus died, he did not abandon the spirit of hope for the solution from a human point of view. He still believed in the human potential. What he did was to give us increased power. That is what the Christians found out as they moved about Jerusalem and experienced the coming of the Holy Spirit. For our problem is the problem that Jesus saw. It is not enough for us just to use our brains. It is important that we let the Divine use our brains and our bodies, and our wills. We should also go to Gethsemane with Jesus, becoming Jesus ourselves and say to the Divine, "Not my will be done, but thy will be done in me and through me."

That's the challenge of being Christian in today's world. As we yield to the Divine in us we are able to become really, fully, divine human beings. That's what Jesus as a human being became. He leaves it to you to carry on in his place. For his spirit is here to dwell within us. Thus Jesus says, "Behold I stand at your door and knock, and if you will open it I will come in and dwell with you." He will give you strength and power to accomplish the coming of the Kingdom of God. "Our father, who art in heaven, thy Kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven." That's the prayer he taught. So this week, live with Jesus, go through those experiences, the agonies, and realize that you are followers of Jesus, and you have the opportunity to sacrifice your will to the Divine potential within you and let it work for you.

Lead us to Gethsemane, Oh God! Lead us to Gethsemane, Oh God! Give us the strength and the will to say, "God, we yield to you, in the name of the one who taught us the way to fulness of life. Amen.

Psalm Sunday Parade
Park Avenue Christian Church

Scripture Mathew 21:1-11

Everyone likes a parade, particularly children. And every one of us has a bit of the child within us. Just a block up the street, seemingly so few years ago, I used to lie in my bed and early in the morning, 3 to 4 a.m., I heard the familiar sounds of a clop, clop, clop of the horses and mules as they were pulling wagons and caissons from Fort Des Moines down toward the center of town to prepare for a parade. Even in those early awesome moments, hearing those wagons roll, the snap of the reins against the backsides of the animals. The occasionally chucking and occasionally a word of emphasis when an animal was not keeping in proper line. The gee and the haw, the get-up, whatever was used. To hear those sounds coming through, somewhat muted, because it was in the morning would bring one wide awake.

Occasionally to hear a command go down the line and the whole procession stop. The snorting, the stamping, the whinnying of the animals comes back to me even now, as it was then. Then to start up again and the caissons rolling again and finally fading away into the distance. How much excitement came up inside of me. And in the morning I would say to my father, can we go see the parade? Often as not, we would go downtown to see the parade. Memorial Day, Fourth of July, Armistice and many, many other occasions of special note. And particularly do I remember a parade soon to come again, the Drake Relays parade. So much excitement, so much positive. Many of the parades, memories of the past and the sacrifices made by persons no longer able to be with us. Some deceased, because of war, others in sanatoria and hospitals.

I also remember in the parades those special persons who somehow or another attached themselves to any sort of occasion. I cannot particularly identify exactly, perhaps some of you can, two persons. One who always wore a khaki sort of military outfit with a cross on, particularly the lapels. He had a name, which name slips me, but he always had his place in the parade

and he was marching down there at that parade, witnessing to his brand of religious loyalty.

There was another gentleman who always wore white robes and occasionally carried a cross, emulating Christ. And as a kid I'd sit or stand on the curb. Occasionally, balanced by my father, standing on a fire plug, to be able to see what was coming. Always these regulars would be in the parade, particularly these two persons. If they were not there, it would create consternation in the crowd.

But I don't remember them ever missing a parade. Maybe if they weren't in the front of the parade, we'd find them eventually straggling along toward the end. Everyone likes a parade. There's something that grips you about it. And then the bands come marching along, their stirring music and cadence seems to grip you. There are other kinds of activities that are quite frequent this day and have been since the time of the '60s, although they've been throughout the history of man and those were called demonstrations, or protest marches.

When people, pressed by concern for injustices, as they see them, or a desire to end wars, go to the streets. Usually, according to our present laws, having secured parade permits. And so they march. Hopefully, they seek to attract the media's attention so that even the smallest presence can have the largest influence. With placards, with songs of overcoming, with chants and slogans. And so it has been, Vietnam, the nuke, El Salvador, utility rates, farm prices, ERA, the question of abortion. All sorts of testimony being given in demonstrations. Many persons count these people as dissidents. If they are dissidents in other lands, then we are concerned about them. If they are dissidents in our land, then we are concerned about them. But our concern is somewhat different. There are dissidents in other lands. People protest to those governments and say, please, let us have the freedom of expression. If they are dissidents in our land, it bothers us, because it is disturbing. We want them to shut up and go away.

Way, way, way back, there was a parade in Jerusalem. A parade which started out with joy and hosannas and hallelujahs, and all the aspects of a celebration. There weren't any particular slogans, except just acknowledgements of the character of the person that they were honoring in the parade. Joyous shouts. Particularly we gained the impression that there were children and music and other optimistic presentations, a hope for the future. As we look at that parade, we've become interested in something else, because it seems not to be a parade of memory, a parade of recollection, but it seems to be a prelude. A prelude to the beginning of a morality play. Of a mini-act pageant.

For you see, during the week which followed, the main actor, namely Jesus, crowded a lifetime of teaching and demonstration in one week. It was a one-man demonstration, not a protest only, but a demonstration about religion, about life, about the future. An example of how one person, hungry for justice, empowered by God, can really overcome the world. Jesus used not only the spoken word, but visual arts, the visual aids of the day, to show how one should live and die and live forever.

Notice the lessons and we can only rapidly touch them this morning. A barren fig tree, a visual aid. From that he taught that to have the trappings of religion, the pious language, the exact doctoral formulations, the bowings and scrapings and muttering the prayers, to have all of that and not have that which enhances the quality of one's life and the lives of those with whom one comes in contact. a religion which does not free one's self and one's fellows and enhance justice and love and mercy in society, is a religion that is fruitless and to be condemned.

Or another demonstration, where he figuratively cleansed the temple of its commercialism. And he suggested, not only suggested, but proclaimed that this was a house of prayer for whom? For all peoples, saying that Judaism is not a narrow sect or ethnic religion, but really in its practice must be a religion which encompasses all people the world around. Even more there was implied another lesson. If one would recall that he said that the true dwelling place of God is within one's self. One's body carries God.

How important it is that that body be kept clean and that we do not induce in it substances which deteriorate it physically. That we have proper habits, proper hygiene and care for our body properly, even more that the mind and the soul and the heart be free of rancor and bitterness, be forgiving. Not the temple of stone but the temple of flesh, Jesus said, was the abiding place of God. The temple of stone is for all people and the temple of flesh is to serve all people. He spoke of the power of prayer and pointed out that when the divine power is united with the intentions of human power, it is so powerful that the miracle of mountain moving is possible.

He also demonstrated that one should lie with one foot on earth and one foot in heaven. One foot in present time and one foot in eternity. Render under Caesar the things that are Caesar's and then to God the things that are God's. You do not flee life. You do not go into a cloister. You do not stay forever in the desert. You come out and you serve and you serve because God Almighty is servant of all. You, too, have this privilege. You serve because God creates time and He is master of eternity and you share in all realms of time.

He gave a simple two sentence summary of all the highfaluting religious preaching and teaching that ever went on. In a quick lesson he said, the law, and all the comments of all the theologians can be summed up in this. You shall love God with everything you have, your total being and also love your neighbor. Succinct, clear, precise. For any person at any level of sophistication to understand. He also pointed out the significance of the least contribution to a good cause. And that the least contribution with the deepest and total intent is as great, if not greater, than the greatest contribution, with lesser intent. In the story of the widow's mite, every effort stacks up. So we saw recently, as the school children filled those sacks with sand and soil to build a levee to protect Fort Wayne, Indiana. Each little mite of effort built a mighty levee to withstand a flood.

Some years ago, after I first returned to Des Moines, I remember going down by Gray's Lake. Some of you may remember some of those days of floods, racing down through both the Des Moines and the Raccoon plains. I remember holding sacks as other people shoveled in and then reversing and filling sacks. It was interesting to me to see persons of good intention coming back and after a while, backs beginning to get weary, because they had not been used to this work. Or other persons who suddenly found blisters on their hands because they had not worn gloves. But still they persisted. The thing that amazed me, though, was that it was the younger persons, the children, the teenagers, who were in there for hours, from early in the morning until late at night and sometimes overnight. And they would jump on the trucks as they rushed to the levees and the bags would be placed. There was something of a community effort which bound everybody together. There was one little disillusionment when I saw a person of parts who came down, who was trying to find somebody to give some money to. He said, I'll give you some money if you'll fill some sacks for me. It was interesting that this younger person said, I'm already filling sacks. I don't need your money. Here's a sack.

In any event, Jesus, by that story of the widow's mite, pointed out to us that it is the totality of the sacrifice that counts and the attitude of the person behind it. Once again he emphasized the universality of religion. When the Greeks came inquiring and his disciples sought to put them off Jesus insisted that the whole world, the Greek world, the Gentile world, was included in this universalizing of religion.

He told the story of the grain falling to the earth. and that the seed must die in order to live. We know about this as some of us already, with some adventure and optimism, have planted some seeds, at least some potatoes and some onion sets. We know that if that seed does not sprout, actually if it does not die, there's no life in the future for that seed as a plant. He pointed out that efforts to preserve ourselves and enhance our own place, result in death. But giving ourselves and letting go and pouring ourselves out into the lives of

others, in a sense dying for others, enhances life on earth. He pointed out that our task is to be a light to the world, yes we are to seek and save the lost. He also emphasized in that week that the priests of earthly possessions, even this stone house of God, would be destroyed and the city would be destroyed. The priests so proud would see earthquakes can shake their buildings down.

We found out what is like, oh so close, and it could happen here. Tornados, many of them rushing through the midriff of America, devastating and killing. Pointing out how fickle we are, if we place our trust and hope in earthly goods and the accumulation of wealth, that which rusts and moth corrupts. We should lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven. Those treasures are the relationships we have to each other of benefit and love and relationships with all persons the world around of benefit and love.

On and on and on he taught that week. Particularly did he teach the parable of the talents. We just can't sit on what God has given us. And with that parable is a concept of judgment. What we are given, we are duty-bound to increase and to whom much is given, much will be required. It's our task not to conserve, to protect and to hide our talents, but to risk, adventure and to give, so that the talents that we have may result, not just in an increase of virtue for ourselves or even to hear, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant," but so that others will catch the contagion and use their talents in the same way. Like levin within the dough and the whole batch of bread is yeasted. So all of our fellows are enhanced and they, in turn, create reverberations which enhance us. That's getting into sync. Getting synchronized with each other. Serving, so that in the end, the combination of two is more than two and three more than three. And a group can be a crowd. And 12 apostles can begin a march that goes across the earth.

That's the challenge. A congregation at Park Avenue with renewal and dedication can bring about a renaissance of love, of compassion, of mercy, of peace. Beginning here at Park Avenue, going throughout Des Moines, Polk County, Iowa, the United States and to the outermost parts of the earth. Beginning with the elderly, the sick, the hungry, the naked, the widows, the orphans, the unemployed, the prisoners, the refugees driven by wars and spreading throughout the world. He taught in that last week that the ultimate in giving, the ultimate investment, is life itself. That the life we know within the physical body is never more precious than when it is being given for a worthy cause. When it is being given for God's purpose.

That whole week began as a parade.

Easter
Covenant Christian Church
April 19, 1987

It's been my good fortune through my rather brief life, to spend Easter in various parts of the world, and particularly to share in Christian worship in various parts of the world. Four years ago, almost, I preached on a Thursday night in the Baptist Church in Moscow, an experience which was one that will never leave me. The apprehension, first of all being told just before the service that you were to preach, and not having known it before getting there. Fortunately, it was one of four sermons. They go to real heavy religion in Russia. We have so much freedom of religion, the idea of anybody preaching over 20 minutes would just get to us, wouldn't it? But there they go for a good two hour session, with four sermons. They can match-up to our wonderful choir. I remember after that service, how as we passed among the crowd receiving, the Russian embrace and kiss. Finally, the word that I understood was hallelujah and we began to chant it in a ringing sound clear out across the whole auditorium, as we departed saying hallelujah to each other.

Two years ago, my wife and I worshipped on Palm Sunday in Westminster Abbey, a place of great tradition. It was very moving. Even with a liturgy, with which I was not too familiar, I felt much at home. There was a universality which made me realize that we belonged. The next Sunday, on Easter, we were in a little village church in Sussex. The devotion, the meaning, the feeling was just as intense. In fact, I came to conclude that it was the little churches throughout England, the British Isles, that really gave the leaven to the religious life to that fallen great empire. The next Sunday after Easter, we moved to the north and worshipped in a Scottish Presbyterian church in Dundee. It was vastly different from the Anglican worship the previous two Sundays, but it was universally the same. The one thing that I noticed was the reverence of the scriptures. For as the scriptures were borne in, the Bible and the minister and everybody rose, recognizing the source of their continued guidance.

One and a half years ago, we were in China, visiting with Christians in Shanghai. There, to our amazement, although we had an inkling, that Christianity was alive and well in China, they told us not only of the seminaries that were being opened again about also of the churches that were being re-opened, returned and refurbished by the government, even with rent paid for past use. They told of 10,000 household churches and the need for religious leadership. It was thrilling, at the same time dismaying, because I thought to myself, does it take persecution, does it take deprivation for us to cherish the revelation which has been given to us?

I have worshipped with fellow Christians in churches all over Europe, where I spent most of the year going from university to university, east or west of the Curtain, studying the role of the theological faculty in the universities. I shall never forget being taken by students in Prague in Czechoslovakia, to John Huss's church, there to worship with them. And it was filled and packed. A hymnal was shared with me that was threadbare. They had kept these hymnals in their families through all the years when they were unable to republish in hymnals and scriptures. I can report today that there are new hymnals. An experience, again, that hit me, because I realized that John Huss was burned at the stake for his convictions, by his fellow Christians.

So it has been in my life. As a small child, my missionary parents shared Easter with me in the Philippine islands. At other times, I've met with people to worship at sunrise. I remember one occasion, on Bald Knob in southern Illinois, with a huge cross on the top of that hill, drawing thousands of people, that particular day, during a thunderstorm, to welcome Easter. They dutifully stood there drenched, as I tried, somehow, to bring to them the glory of the resurrection. One has to question, what was it, or what is it that keeps people coming Sunday after Sunday to celebrate Easter? Well, that's indeed what we do. We have a particular day that we celebrate with emphasis. But each Sunday is Easter. What is it that keeps people doing that the world around?

As you recall the disciples of Jesus were depressed by the ignominious death of the source of their recent inspiration. In the midst of that deep depression words began to trickle in that maybe all was not lost. At the same time, there was in their minds a doubt. We must not build up our desires too much. We must beware of wishful thinking. I can remember as I stood by my dying father. It was at a particular point that it was obvious the Spirit had left him. Yet, somehow or another, I saw his chest rise and fall. As I held his wrist, I thought I felt a faint pulse. I had to shake my head and realize it was over with.

So the disciples, up against the reality of death, would shake their heads and say, we must be careful, lest somehow our imaginations get the better of us, the word persisted in coming in, that Jesus was not dead. He had risen. Still, heavy doubt hung on, particularly in people like Thomas. I like to think of him as a person like myself, scientific person, with need for empirical data. He has to know for sure. We don't go for this spookiness. Others along the way, even when He was present with them, would not be sure and did not recognize, until after a long, relatively close association, it suddenly came to them. This is He. This is the Lord. The continued experiences of Jesus brought them to a deepening of their very will. Finally, they believed. But Jesus knew they had not yet evolved beyond their doubt, even with belief. They had not yet evolved beyond belief to faith.

You may know something and you may believe it, but it may not have anything to do with what you do with your lives. It may not have anything to, basically, with your will. And one of our problems in the American educational system is if you can educate everybody and teach them the facts, then we will have a democratic citizenry. There's a fallacy there. Information does not really make for education. For education is that leaven which comes from persons into other persons, the young, particularly. That leaven that says how this information is to be used. The evaluative process, the sense of goals, the sense of future, the sense of direction. Unfortunately in our country, we educate and give information. We may not even be doing as good a job as we should be doing in that area, because we're so busy trying to maintain order and hold class that even information isn't properly transferred.

You see the task we have today is to educate future citizens. What does it mean to be a citizen of a nation? It means to be, above all, a wonderful neighbor. One who knows how to contribute to and build and construct community. Not one who goes out as a parasite to devour, as a source of profit, the market. To be educated, in the true sense, is to be free to love one's neighbor. Jesus knew that their belief, the information about his being alive, was not sufficient. They had to somehow go forward to faith. They had to somehow go forward and be able to inherit his ministry. He knew it would take more than their own desires to come into faith and continue in their faithfulness. They needed the very power of God, the power of the Holy Spirit.

So he said to them a very important last word on this particular occasion, about which we read in the scripture. And so often we do not pay attention to these words. He said, "Tarry and wait for power on high." We're activists, we Americans, with all of our Yankee ingenuity and all that sort of thing. We have an idea and we want to smash out and do it. And we're impatient when others won't go along with us. And how many times we shoot off at the mouth too quickly and shoot from the hip before we've taken proper aim. We need to take that ammunition, even in ordinary human existence, to contemplate and think through what we've planned to do, and make the commitment to expend the energy. How many times I've seen leaders with great enthusiasm stand up and pronounce what we're going to do this year and then things just sort of peter out.

Jesus didn't want that to happen to the movement he'd started. He wanted these people to be fully committed and to wait until they have actually opened themselves up to the power of God. For He knew that once they let God in, then they and God could not be stopped. That's the way it is, my friends. Being a member of the church and running the church just the way we run our human affairs is not sufficient, unless we pause and let God enter in. This is

the day when we especially remind ourselves that we should hear from God and wait for God to give us power from on high.

Now we have explained what happened to Jesus's disciples, but how did what happened to a little band of disciples expand into a world movement? This little band were Jews, who inherited the belief that God had made a covenant with their people, their nation. That as long as they served God, God would bless them unusually and fully. As long as they maintained their faith in God and were obedient to His instructions, they would be blessed as a people, through thick or through thin.

Now Jesus came into their midst. He did not repudiate that covenant or that background. But he took it and expanded that faith in God and said that any person, by personal faith, personal faith in God, could and would receive power. God's promises were not just to a nation, but to any person all over the world. All persons, who before were the Gentiles, the Goy, outside the Promise. Those persons outside the Jewish nation now were included, and that's what the cross of Jesus Christ said.

God died there, not for his chosen people, the Israelites, but for the whole world. Jesus expanded faith in a particular promise of God to a nation, to a promise of God to all who would believe that God was their Father, was a Father of love, who loved the whole wide world. In his hands was the whole wide world. So much did He love them that he gave his only begotten Son, so that whoever believed in him might not perish, but have life everlasting. Now he was not talking about life which began after death. He was talking about life which begins the minute one accepts Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and let's God's power come in. For life everlasting begins at that moment and death is but a transitory move from human existence into celestial existence.

We make a mistake saying that eternal life begins with our death. It begins with our birth, our rebirth in the baptismal waters, where we die to the old, frail, mortal life and rise again in newness of life, with the power of God upon us. Jesus taught that God would not leave us alone, but will give us strength to face anything in this life. You name it, God is there. Maybe you don't know he's there, but maybe you should open your eyes and your heart, your ears, and discover he's with you.

So we must give priority to God's presence and his love and priority to his Kingdom. Jesus felt that belief and trust in God was basic. He had inherited his Jewish faith. But he came to know God more deeply and accepted the mission of revealing this God to all of us. He led persons who had faith in God through a covenant with a corporate nation, with the nation of Israel, to an

empowering of individuals in community, to be able to take this mission, this emancipating gospel throughout all the world.

If this was the case, that God's power was for them and for everyone, then it is for us. The corporate faith was universal. God's love is for all people. Empowerment was for Jew and Greek, Roman, Scythian, Persian, Egyptian, Mead, slave or free, female or male. Not just for a separate class of priests or holy men, but for all, all who would repent of their sinful ways and open up to God's power in their lives.

Here again the message. Especially on this morning of mornings. Christ has risen and the message that says "God loves you and you and you." No one's left out. Our task is to have faith in God and let His power, His Holy Spirit surround us and take us from our worries and proceed day by day to love, first in our families, then our neighbors, then in our community, in Des Moines, Iowa, the USA and throughout the world.

For this is the message of Easter. Let God's power come into your heart. You are today's disciples. You are His band of followers. You have rehearsed and remembered the distraught feelings because of a crucified leader, and again you've remembered that He has risen and His power is for all of us. Use that power and share God's love, beginning with each other and with your families, at your work and on the highways and byways of life.

I conclude by sharing with you an Easter poem written by a former student, by the name of Daniel Ketchel. Some of you may have heard his son give a concert the other evening.

"Easter is a thought. When given birth from our contracted brow flies upward to the mind of God, it is a fragile of hope upon the human heart. That love that makes us never want to part.

"The gift of all in men, not just in vast and sunny plains, but in dark, downtown apartments, Easter is the death of heaven, A new intensity within your voice. The last gasp of indifference.

"Easter is a flower in your yard, pushing face ward from the dark to open to the sun's warm rays, spilling on this dull, brown planet the miracle of green and red and white.

"It is a song we can't lose from our memories. A hymn of gladness that we are alive. A never ending hallelujah, made of notes always within our range, yet forever out of reach.

"Easter is truth and logic, un-commercialized. It is geometry and history and music. It is language and EMC². It is a pure silence, the computation of a God, who was the same yesterday, today and forever.

"Easter is the church. Fumbled by the human hands within her charge but, nevertheless, the church of God surviving our mistakes, because of people who do not quit, as God did not."

Easter is the risen Lord of life speaking to you at this very minute.
Listen.

The Walk to Emmaus
Covenant Christian Church
The Sunday After Easter 1987

Scripture Luke 24:13-32

I believe if I were to subject many of you to close inspection, I would see the symptoms of Saturday-itis. Saturday-itis particularly in the springtime results from putting forth a gargantuan effort to try to do in one spring day everything that has been delayed all through the winter, postponed from the fall, in preparation for summer that will be here maybe even before we have a spring. I think I see it. There's a certain dis-ease of motion, slow languor, because of the expense of surplus energies on this Saturday. There's dirt under the fingernails. There may even be some grime around the eyelids and maybe in the ears. There are coveralls or work pants that are all smudged. Probably also bearing the echoes of appropriate language for addressing lawn mowers and other things with motors and devices, Rototillers, that won't start, because one failed to drain the fuel and properly oil up for the winter. Yes, and probably there are some dirty forks and hoes and shovels that one hung up late last night without cleaning properly. There may even be some piles of leaves that one hopes the wind will not blow today before one can get back after the service to get them garnered and put away. Oh yes, if one looks there's probably somewhere what was once in the shade of a tree but now is already in the glare of the morning sun a tin can. What's in that tin can? Some fishing worms that that were garnered when the leaves were raked or the soil was turned. Some one forgot to put them in a cool place where they could be kept dormant for the next fishing expedition.

Yes, Saturday-itis, happens when one works like everything and strains muscles that one never had before. At least they weren't aware of them until now. I, too, suffer from Saturday-itis. I admit, all the scrubbing with a little fingernail brush did not get the soil out. There's a blister or two, and I think if I

blink my eyes I know that the wind blew some of the grime that I stirred up from the lawnmower. But isn't it wonderful that each year there is this resurrection? That each year calls forth from us energies that somehow we didn't feel we had? So life is renewed. Within us and without. So it was for some gentlemen who were on their way to another village in ancient times, having gone through the fall and winter of human relations, they somehow could not believe that spring was upon them and that new life was breaking forth. Somehow the devastated winter of human attitudes towards human beings, the desire to kill, to remove, that which is in opposition had taken over their frame of reference. They somehow could not believe even though nature itself resuscitates itself in each spring that there was opportunity for resuscitation of the life of a human being.

They were fortunate, for their hearts were alive within them by the presence of Jesus himself. He walked and talked with them. They became convinced of the spiritual dimension, of the divine dimension of the human being. But the human being was more than fang and claw. The human being was of God himself, was of divine stuff. It's interesting, perhaps tragic, that all too soon Christians did something to Jesus that I'm sure he had no intention should be done. The words I'm about to mouth now are words, if you understand me candidly, which not too many generations earlier have subjected me to the charge of heresy and perhaps even death at the stake. If you are going to attempt to find Jesus now, where would you look? For most of Christianity you find Jesus at the church. For most of Christianity you find the real presence of Jesus at the altar in a communion table. For the vast majority of Christians throughout the world even now, the body and blood of Jesus Christ after appropriate prayers by persons of apostolic succession ordained is to be found at the altar. One may go into the presence of Christ by going to the tabernacle where the remains of that consecration are often placed to find Christ in person and there pray to him.

Among Protestants, Christ is to be found in prayer meetings, especially on Wednesday night, in the church building. Made possible by special symbols. All Christians, no matter what tradition, have taken part in the conspiracy to place Christ either on a cross through the form of a crucifix in a tabernacle of consecrated elements, in a church building in certain special events, prayer meetings and other periods of pious concern. The church has been made a contemporary sepulcher over which a stone is rolled by the form of locking of keys only to be opened on Sundays, and in most churches on Sunday morning. Perhaps Jesus is happy. He's been jailed at church and not in the human prisons, which are bad enough for human beings, let alone the son of God. You can suspect that I have more than intimated that Jesus is not to be found in these places. To restrict Jesus to ecclesiastical and theological terms, or theologies, to religious architecture, to man-made concepts,

influenced by Hellenistic Roman and pagan concepts of sacrifice is to deny his humanity. What would you do and how would you react? What considerations would come into your mind? If somehow you became aware that someone with whom you are associated was Christ-like? Jesus appeared to his followers in their ordinary pursuits. He appeared to them fishing and eating and walking and discussing and spent the night with them. Are you prepared to expect Jesus to pop up anywhere in your life? Are you prepared to find Jesus in the person with whom you are working, walking, talking, living?

I suspect we would treat Jesus if he should appear to us much as we treat guests. How do we treat guests? To our town or house? Somebody special, we get all cleaned up and painted up, raked up, spruced up, get on our party dresses, we don't want to be surprised, we have a special date and it's all prearranged. We want to show this guest the new and the best. That's how we meet important people. Not only is Jesus kept buried alive in the church, at the most he's just a guest. He comes only on special occasions when the house is clean and we want to have special observances. He comes only when we schedule him. Generally on Sunday morning. Beginning at 8:30!

Jesus for the Christian is a member of the family. He's a member of the group. Everyone of us should be living sensitized in our Christian living and expectations so that we feel his presence everywhere on all occasions. The heart of the Christian should be continually on fire by Jesus' presence. The real presence of Jesus is not to be incarcerated and written in stone or even in symbols of bread and wine. That is heresy. The real presence of Christ is in the Christian. The real presence is revealed by the fire in one's heart as we see in one another Christ's presence. The Christian society can come only when Christ is recognized as belonging in all aspects of our individual lives. The world of peace can come only when so-called Christians of various nations recognize that to kill another is to crucify Christ again.

For centuries, except for the rantings of some mystics and saint-like persons many of whom were not heard, except for the prophetic utterances of persons we have stoned, The bulk of Christendom has literally been practicing a diversion to enable us to keep from having to really let go and let the Christ in us become. We have played a trick on ourselves. Perhaps at the instigation of the evil one. How he must laugh at how quickly these Christians in their piety cover up and bury their divinity. Christ's mission to us in taking on human form was the mission of God to us saying to each one of us you are of my very being. Do not reject me. I am your father, you are my children. This earth is your stewardship in your paradise. Please come back home and let's make a good family. I forgive all by taking all of the badness, the evil of the past and of the future. He said also I will continue to die and resurrect as long as there is any hope in anyone of you who is willing to accept his or her

divinity and acknowledge their childhood, their sonship or their governorship under me. Yes, and be crucified for others faults.

The day of Christ, the day of crucifixion, the day of resurrection is not over. It is not one event; it is a continuous possibility of redemption. You, each of you, are the Christ for others. Jesus's dwelling place is in the hearts and souls of each of us. Hopefully not dormant, but being lifted up and expanded so that others say, my how our hearts are warmed in the presence of that person. That's what redemption is. God needs you, for you are of God. If you choose to be. For God does not force himself upon you, he is loving you, and giving himself for you and saying please, accept the challenge and give yourself for each other. You are walking to Emmaus in your life and even in this great America you may be Christ for somebody else walking beside you. Let your light so shine before your fellows that they may know that God is love, and that Christ's redemptive love is still being expressed in living human beings.

Seeing Is Believing
Park Avenue Christian Church
Sunday After Easter

Scripture John 20:19-31

As I look over the congregation I am aware of a phenomenon. I see faces here familiar for decades to me, and I believe I see second and third generations. There seems to be a similitude of likeness. Now isn't it too bad that some of our kids look like us? In my own case I married a good-looking lady and thank goodness my kids took her looks, but as you can see my boys took my hair. I was mindful also of the fact that as a youngster living just about a block away from the church early Easter morning there was much agitation in our home as father and mother awakened four children and each of us had certain duties to do and there was a scampering and a struggling around to get here to church not at sunrise but before sunrise because the preacher and his family should be in place to take care of their duties as a good example for the rest of the people of the congregation. I cherish all of those memories. The excitement, the anticipation, there was something about Easter that even from my youngest moments that I still really appreciate and it has grown through the ages. I say now ages because when you have lived several decades then you feel the ages. To the place that even now I have that youthful, childlike excitement about Easter.

It is revived and reinforced by all the tremendous talent that has been portrayed already this day for which we can only give God thanks. To those participating our deepest appreciation for your talents. I think all of us have had an example of resurrection as we see the sun come up these last days and blast away at old Man Winter who seems somehow to put that beautiful white blanket of wintry death over us to remind us that we mustn't be too glib about talking about gardens and things like that. We are frail creatures of this earth. Mother nature has a way of returning us to humility.

But even at that, I have reason to believe having done my cross country skiing last week that there will be no further snows sufficient at least for me to ski across. My neighbors are still wondering about that old man who is celebrating his birthday by skiing at 10:30 at night on that last snowy night. He came up to their doors and punched their doorbells and as they open the door some of them clad in those claddings that remind one that they're going to bed, they were greeted with, Merry Christmas, come on out and play! I can assure you I was nearly shot a couple of times. But they simply said, well there's that old kook again out fooling around. Isn't it wonderful to have the cycle of the earth and nature bringing us again to the time of planting and the promise of future harvest? We worry and we seem not to be satisfied until we see that crop in the barn. For seeing is believing. Even though we have the assurance and the hope that each year pretty much we are going to have at least somewhere in the world times to plant and times to reap. It's our feeling that we must use our empirical senses of seeing and hearing and touching and tasting to confirm our existence.

There was a gentleman by the name of PT Barnum, in his private life a tremendous person, but who nevertheless knew us well when he said there's a sucker born every minute. We seem to be patsies for simulation, for quackery, the susceptibility to flimflam in our drive to believe. Yet we remain skeptical and sometimes it takes a major experience or the result thereof to make us believe. Last year as we drove through Littleton, Illinois, one of the many places that had been hit by a tornado, it made me a believer again to see the destruction that that wind had caused. Huge, huge metal structures simply torn and twisted apart and scattered in small pieces across the land. The devastation leaving debris through which the farm equipment would run for years to come.

Or as I also recall the floods of the Illinois and the Mississippi rivers in the years past before they were dammed and levied, and I would watch those floods. Whole houses with occasionally an unlucky animal or chicken atop the roof swirling and turning borne away. Saving the memorabilia out of people's houses being borne away by the floods. A recent fire at a neighbors house and coming in the next day to see the kindly neighbors with a scoop shovel scooping out all that which had been accumulated, the pictures, the baby

shoes of generations obliterated by fire. The year after the war seeing the piles and piles of rubble. It made a believer out of me as to the possibilities of destruction by nature and man. Somehow or another I am increasingly worried by the human ability to destroy.

Our empirical senses, our sensing organs, are the devices by which we establish reality. It's interesting as I see myself watching people shopping for groceries. Now I shouldn't say this, this is a sexist statement I like to watch the women do it. It says there plainly what it is in most cases, but they reach over and squeeze it. There's even a toilet tissue advertisement about don't squeeze the whatever-it-is. In any event, we pinch, we touch, we take a loaf of bread and we go "whoosh.". It's amazing how we have to see and feel and touch. We do that to muskmelon. Either that or we shake it. We've got to somehow use our empirical senses to determine what is real. Now if we are that way, we must remember then that one apostle who said, I've got to see in order to believe, I've got to touch in order to know what is.

We are Thomas, he was the prudent one. He was not easily swept off his feet by wishful thinking. I think he was from Missouri. The show-me state. Most of us are from Missouri most of the time. We like to think we are not gullible. When Jesus resurrected from the dead, it was the sight of him and the sound of his voice that was convincing to his close followers. Now you must remember Jesus was not seen by the public, only by his close followers. You see, Jesus was not interested in a stunt involving survival. Jesus actually was not interested in his own physical resurrection. His main purpose was the need for a resurrection of spirit and enthusiasm in his followers. His mission was not just to survive himself or to survive from his death. His mission was to bring help to the widows, the orphans, the imprisoned, the lonely, the sick, to establish justice and mercy among the living. He wanted his program to continue. The spirit and will of his followers must be resurrected. Seeing Jesus, they became believers again. Not just in him as a miraculous phenomenon, but his passion which was to seek and to save the lost and help to bring in this life, the abundant life, and to bring forth a life which should last for eternity. Jesus knew his followers. He had trained and taught them. And he also anticipated that they would weaken. So he came back. His job was not done.

Now too many times we quit with celebrating the resurrection and we fail to realize that the reason, the keystone, the kingpin, the final touch of Jesus ministry was that he returned to his disciples, to empower them. It tells that he breathed on them. He restored the spirit to them. He reminded them that that humanity would still frustrate them and that they must be strong in the power of God. What he did was to say specifically go beyond this event, this tragedy into all the world. Go beyond, stop feeling sorry and get active and

feed my sheep. The main purpose of Jesus's resurrection, then, was not the miracle of a person being able to cheat death, but the resuscitation of a ministry among the living. In the early days God made a covenant with a chosen people that they should be named mitzvah, a good deed, a life of good deeds, a good example among the peoples of the world. And again, God through Jesus commissioned his disciples to be a mitzvah throughout the world. Jesus says to all of his followers each year as he did to those eleven and later to thousands around the world who each year celebrate Jesus' resurrection now depart and get to work. Witness and teach, do the works of the spirit so the world may believe, so peace may come. Become an extension of me, I return to the father and I need you to live with and for others the good life I have taught you so that my kingdom of peace and love may come on earth even as it is in heaven.

The disciples were to become, through God, the extension of Christ's ministry so that others seeing and feeling the effects of such quality living will believe and join in, so that they might have life and have it more abundantly. You see the story of salvation, the history of salvation is revealed in Jesus' action not just at the cross, again through his action and commissioning of his followers to continue his ministry. You have been commissioned just as much as those first apostles. You have been commissioned. You are the successors of the apostles. Not a special class of clergy but every Christian, every believer in Christ. You are the successors of Adam and the chosen people as a mitzvah of blessing to those around you. In First John, we hear these phrases, that which from the beginning we have heard which we have seen with our eyes, that which we have seen and heard, we proclaim also to you so that you may have fellowship with us at that today is what Jesus is doing. His presence is here and he is breathing this is in you, too. Go out into all the world and preach the gospel and to be seen practicing the Christian life so that others may believe. There were those in Jesus' time who said, "Show us a sign." And Jesus said, "You have seen me but you still did not believe." And you will find others in your own generation, my friends, who will not believe.

Calloused Knees
 Covenant Christian Church
 Feb.15, 1987
 Scripture Mt.26:36-44

I don't suppose that there is one in our midst who does not know the subject on which I going to speak. You know this because Sunday I announced that I was going to speak on the subject of "Prayer." Prayer is a subject of great consideration resulting in many books, much contemplation and much humor. This subject reminds me of something that happened early in the history of our church. I don't think it is apocryphal but is a true happening. The story is told of a Disciple and a Methodist preachers riding together and they were arguing scripture along the way. They ran into a thunder storm which soaked them. Seeking shelter they stopped in a tavern and the keeper seeing their condition offered them a glass of wine. After some discussion about the propriety of enbibing they agreed to accept the offer. When the drinks came the Disciple downed his drink. Whereupon the Methodist chided him saying , "The Scripture says in all things give thanks."

Now everybody in the tavern was following the dispute. The Methodist bowed his head and gave a long prayer, not only giving thanks for the drink but that the Lord should give the Disciple a proper understanding of the Bible. During the prayer the Disciple reached over took the Methodist's glass of wine and drank it. When the Methodist opened his eyes and saw what the Disciple had done he began to berate him. The Disciple minister said but Scriptures also say, "Watch and pray."

A little boy was asked one time whether he ever prayed in church and he said, "Yes, yes, I do pray." "Well when do you pray?" Well, when the adults have their silent period of prayer and meditation, just before the sermon." "Well, what do you pray?" "Well, my usual prayer, Now I lay me down to sleep." I think that may be the way many of us get involved, particularly when the minister becomes involved in his long-winded pastoral prayers. First thing you know, my mind was wandering and wishing that I could sit down for prayer, rather than standing. We used to sing, particularly in the evening church services, the prayer hymn, stand on the last verse, and then my father would hold forth.

I suppose as a little boy wearied by having played umpteen get-up games of sandlot baseball, football or soccer, having attended Sunday School and church, and then Christian Endeavor and then the evening service, and then trying to stand, particularly when my father would call forth a season of prayers, several persons would take part. There would always be the one elder who would have the same prayer, which went on and on and on. I'd

stand there, hold onto the pew to keep from sitting down. When I was small enough, I could reach up and hang onto the pew. When I grew taller to slouch down on the pew was not a very pious posture. Prayer and the postures of prayer is a deep consideration. How do we handle the very center of worship?

Well the knees figure very much in prayer. The knees are an important part of the anatomy and carry great symbolism for our understanding of human relations and they figure in prayer. Kneeling down through the centuries of human existence has generally indicated the levels of social existence. From the king clear down to the serf, each person kneeled and turned according to the hierarchy of formality in autocratic existence. Whenever anyone came to another person who had power and had a petition or request, it was the practice that one would kneel before the superior as they presented the petition. Whenever anyone was to be granted a boon or knighthood, the candidate would kneel in order to be dubbed. We continue this even today in the ordination of a pastor or priest.

We understand that when a person is overpowered, generally this person goes to their knees. As a kid there was a little game, I don't know whether they play it today, where you lock your fingers and see who could push the other person down to their knees. How many of you have ever played that game? Ah, it's still being played. That's interesting. It was to show who was the strongest.

Young men, I don't know whether they do any more, at least they used to, kneel to propose. That's the last time they ever knelt. It was a false indication of what their mood and posture would be. They sort of sucked the lady in by kneeling and saying, "Please, will you marry me." I presume that in order to compensate for equality between the sexes, that now the woman should kneel and propose to the man. This may be the last time she would have to ever kneel, or mean to kneel.

I don't recall my proposal. I don't think I knelt. In fact, I'm not even aware I was conscious. I don't know whether she slipped something in my drink, but all of a sudden I came to and she had her arms around me and she was saying, oh this is wonderful. I know it happened on the 3rd date, but I think that she gassed me. She and her roommate, she confessed afterwards, investigated all sorts of perfumes to see which one would be the one that would knock me out.

So I was suppliant. I didn't just kneel, I was prostrate and I've been ever since. Not because she's kept me down there, I haven't wanted to be anything else but kneeling and prostrate before her, she's so wonderful. I

think I don't quite know how to react to what I have just said. Everything else was laughable, wasn't it?

In the past criminals and persons being executed would kneel and place their head on the block. We also give some indication of a character trait. when we talk about some one being weak kneed. The Bible tells of knees becoming weak because of fasting. You've heard the phrase, "I was so frightened, so scared, that my knees knocked together."

The knees are so involved in our whole expression of life, that we take them for granted. In fact, I could remember one phrase that was used when I was a lad. You behave yourself or I'll put you across my knees, if it was my dad, or my lap, if it was my mother, and give you a spanking. You've never heard that. You've never laid anybody across your knees or been laid across somebody's knees and given a whacking? Actually, the word "knee" in Hebrew comes from the same root as the word, "blessing." Also, you can tell from a person's knees, pretty much what they are. Certainly you can tell a gardener. That gardener whose knees of his trousers are clean, is not a good gardener, for you've got to get down in order to get those little weeds out.

The knees are also a source of affection. Climb up on my lap here and give me a hug and a kiss, says the adult to the child. To sit a child on one's knees, in olden times, was a symbol of adoption. You'll find that in the New Testament. To take a child of one's handmaiden, and bring that child up on one's knees, said to all the tribe that this is my child and I adopt him as legitimate.

One of the greatest acts that an adult can do is to get down on their knees to the level of a little child, where they can look eye to eye. How often we are so busy, to just move off of our standing position. Instead we say, be quiet, or in a minute. We should take time to get down and find out where they really are. Yes, the knees are a concern of a mother for her child, because what goes out first are the knees of the trousers.

So, the knees are fundamental in terms of our whole life's expression, and particularly, in prayer. You remember the story of Daniel in the lion's den. He was one of several Satraps. Particularly successful was he in managing his area of administration and Darius, the King of the Meds and the Persians, decided to make him president, or head of all of his lieutenants, reporting directly to him. The others becoming upset and jealous and envious, went to the king and said, we think it's important that we promulgate a special law. For 30 days, nobody is to bow to any other god or king or any other person, save you, oh king and emperor. Flattered as he was, he said yes and signed

it. Only to discover that his very good friend, and the person in whom he trusted so much, was to be caught up in the very web that he had woven.

For Daniel, even knowing, continued his practiced of going to the window, which opened toward Jerusalem and kneeling three times a day to pray to God. And so he was taken. In no way could the king abrogate his law, because the law of the Meads and Persian is that the king's decree is never to be broken. Daniel was thrown in the lion's den with the admonition by the king, please, may your god sustain you. And in 24 hours, the next day, the king sends and finds that Daniel is alive, for Daniel's God had taken care of him.

It was the practice of prayer on one's knees that got Daniel in trouble. How many of us would be thrown into a lion's den today for the reason of praying? Nobody probably would bother us, but the point is they wouldn't have anything to bother us about. How many of us pray three times a day? Now you don't have to look to University Avenue and the regional office to pray, you can look any way you want to. But just think about it. That was a symbol which stood out so much it identified him and made him what he is and what he was. I won't finish this story, the story's a very cruel story as to what happened to those who made the accusations. But I ask that you pray regularly and try praying on your knees.

I remember the first time I was taken, as a little boy, with my father to an adult prayer meeting. It happened to be a gathering of the elders. And they felt somehow or another that they needed a season of prayer for the welfare of that church and themselves. Much to my surprise, I saw my father and those grown men get up from their chairs and down on the floor kneeling beside their chairs. You can imagine the feeling that came over me, as a glance from my father suggested that I was old enough to participate. I got down off that chair and knelt with the men!

There was a power which gripped me, like I'd never felt before, and in many ways, since. These earnest, hard-bitten men, many of them on WPA in the midst of the depression, on their knees praying for the sake of the church and the community and their congregation. I was allowed to join into that experience. I'd been taught to pray all my life and knelt by my bed night after night. But never had I felt such power. Yet, you see, somehow or another, kneeling to pray has gotten out of fashion. We read about Jesus in Gethsemane praying. He fell on his face. The paintings, I remember, he was kneeling by a rock praying in the Garden of Gethsemane. One of the things that concerns me is the growing presence of Islam in America today. Their practice of prayer is putting us to shame.

if you've traveled in the Middle East countries? You have heard the call to prayer. You would go to the mosque if you could, if not, where you were you would kneel facing Mecca and also prostrate yourself at least three times. Kneeling before God and praying.

The Koran says, prayer is such a timely prescription for believers and it is true that the power of Islam is the sense of community in prayer. (one caveat, The prayers of men seem to be more effective or necessary than women's)

We probably have a problem today with kneeling. We are in a democracy and we live in an age of do-it-yourself psychology. It's difficult in a society of equals to bring ourselves to kneel. The act of kneeling, in many ways, is the act of ultimate humiliation. It leaves one defenseless at the mercy of the one who's standing over us. We have a post-reformation reaction, we don't kneel to priests to papal representatives, we stand to pray. We say within ourselves, theologically rationalizing our position, God is love. He loves us so much he doesn't require us to grovel in front of him. Our God is a spirit. Does one kneel to an impersonal spirit?

We all move in the psychological condition that we're self-made persons, we must learn to take care of ourselves. If we do get in trouble, we go to a head shrink or a psychologist or psychiatrist to straighten out our thinking. Why should we kneel in prayer? But the real question for Christians is the attitude that we bring into prayer and the frequency of prayer. In our today's style of prayer, most of the time we pray only when others hear us, like the Lord's Prayer, as we did this morning in church. Or as an elder, or maybe, not so frequently anymore, before our family at the dining table.

It's a question whether we even move to pray regularly in secret, as Christ commands us to do. We need to ask the question of ourselves, who is it we prayed to and what sort of a person is this God? How often do we pray, every morning, every evening, at meals? Do we ever kneel when we pray? Do we ever kneel yet by our beds to pray? What do we pray for? What good is prayer? Are we afraid to be caught praying? Because if we're caught praying, then we sort of enunciate what kind of ideals we espouse, and that gives us the risk of being considered hypocrites, because we don't live up to our prayers.

Is it a defensive mechanism that keeps us from prayer? If we did kneel at a church meeting like this, would that not be a real proclamation of where our primary and ultimate focus is? Our perhaps today we are just too unbending and "standing (not) in the need of prayer." Perhaps we're just so absorbed in TV, Facebook and modern day living, there's no need, time or energy left to pray. Completely sedated, and so we move along.

Really, what is prayer? James Montgomery in a poem, with which you're all familiar, writes, "Prayer is the soul's sincere desire, uttered or unexpressed; the motion of a hidden fire that trembles in the breast. Prayer is a burden of a sigh; the falling of a tear; the upward glancing of an eye, when none but God is near."

Prayer, I can say, is more often the curse of damnation and the dreadful wish, just as much as a benevolent concern. Prayer quality is actually in the nature of the request. If you have any idea what your prayer quality is, think of the nature of the request.

On the lowest rung, one should place a prayer for things for one's self. I say this in all seriousness, but many people have deep, pious intent prayed for hats and coats and refrigerators and new cars and all that sort of thing saying, if it's the Lord's will, I will get it. A higher level is to pray for the empowerment to be a better person. And that's noble. But even higher yet is for empowerment to help one to gain strength to serve others. Particularly if one can include in those others, those beyond one's own family. For if we do believe that charity begins at home, sometimes that's where it ends.

But even higher is intercessory prayer on behalf of others. Even more meritorious is intercessory prayer on behalf of others we do not know even enemies, upon whom we are impersonally dropping bombs. Yes, and pray that we seek other ways than by dropping bombs to bring about peace. But the highest prayer is the prayer of Jesus. "Not my will be done, but thine be done."

The Islamic movement has its strength because of frequency of prayer and regularity of prayer. The Christian movement, as it has grown, has had that same efficacy. Today, prayer on Sundays is not enough. The frequency of prayer, the habitual practice of prayer, is a way that is passed on to the younger generation. So that the children begin to get the idea that prayer is important. That God is important within one's life. The weakness of faith, the vacuum in one's life, is caused by failure to depend upon God in prayer.

The nature of the human being is such that if one does not keep tuned to higher standards, does not relate to God constantly through prayer, we repeat the sins of our fathers. It was Shakespeare that said, "Man commits, in the newest ways, the oldest sins." He also said, "It's man's evil manners that get written in brass and his virtues get written in water." This is what happens in the media. What we are as wicked persons or evil doings, loom large. But the virtues of man do not get the attention. Unfortunately we separate religion and life today and our leaders do not, except on unusual tragedies, call us to

prayer. I must admit with envy in my voice, that the Islamic way, with their calls from the Minaret to prayer is very important.

But one must also realize that even in the Bible, God has said, My house is a house of prayer for all peoples. Is it sufficient that this building be open on Sunday, mainly for prayer? Should it not be that there should be regular meetings of persons together every day of the week in this place to offer prayer? What would happen if there was a steeple or something here that would call. You name the time. At noon or three, whatever. So the community would know that there was a band of people gathered here, kneeling to pray to God and that's what that sound meant.

Are we so polite or so indifferent that we want to just drop ourselves down in the gentle milieu and not let our religion disturb anybody? Or are we just simply so unbending that it never occurred to us that we might by our frequency of prayer, develop callouses on our knees. One of the times I remember most vividly, was when I was invited to make a Catholic Cursillo, a retreat. I had an experience! We were in a room before the Tabernacle of Consecrated Communion, where the believers around me believed that they were speaking directly to Jesus. We knelt every day during that retreat, for periods of an hour, on concrete. For a tender-kneed Protestant, I want to tell you, that was an experience I've never forgotten. As I leaned back, as I shifted from one knee to the other, finally as it went on, I discovered consciousness of my knees disappeared, and I was wafted away mystically like, into real communion with my Lord and Savior.

Calloused knees? Wouldn't it be wonderful if they were calloused, not just from gardening, or even getting down and playing with our kids. Calloused because we knelt by our bedsides. What would happen if we went all the way to kneel by our dining room chairs before we rose up to be seated to take our meal? What would happen to our whole attitude, if we finally admitted that God's love was so great we knelt in reverence? Yet, somehow or another, the life of prayer would come into us and we could yield to God and say, "Thy will be done" and the spirit and light that we need in order to become contagious and spread out into all the community. After all our numbers are far greater than the original 12 who followed Jesus. The same power that girded their loins could gird ours and miracles would happen now and as well as then.

Constant Prayer
Covenant Christian Church
March 1, 1987

Scripture I Thess. 5:1-22

Through the past Sundays, we have been discussing prayer and I want to continue our discussion today. We discussed various aspects of prayer, its history, its role and place in the human scene and its necessity in the life of the Christian and in Christian worship.

Today, it is my intention not only to talk about prayer, but to illustrate the prayer life, by giving examples of prayers. I would urge you to listen attentively and try to discover the similarities and common assumptions in the various prayers. I would urge you to note particular expressions of prayers, which appeal to you, in terms of your own prayer life. How these illustrations may enable you to have the feeling, and subsequently, the words, for expressing yourselves in prayer. I do this not with any supererogation or arrogance, assume that you do not pray or do not know how to pray. However, this perhaps is a false assumption, in turn. I can remember my amazement in dealing with college students, discovering students who did not know what the word Eucharist, communion, Lord's Supper, meant.

I remember on a warm, spring day when the class convinced me we should go out and sit, somewhat prematurely I felt, out on the fresh grass and have class. There, it was my privilege, it turned out, to explain to a young man where the communion came from and to tell him the story of Jesus. He grew up in an American home. His family had a nominal membership in a traditional Protestant church yet, he had no understanding of that which I was speaking. I had to go back and tell the story and when I had told him the story, the essential Gospel story, I said, do you understand? I had tears in my eyes and he did too. Somehow or another, even though perhaps he'd heard and he said he had gone to Sunday School, it had never come through. Maybe that is the way with us. We are so busy, so involved, that prayer is a sort of formality, invocations, opening up of various seasons of activity. Some prayer events are being questioned today because our day is becoming more secularized and the so-called separation of church and state is producing a separation of life from religion. So more than we realize, there may be more of us, many of us who do not know what prayer is about. **It is about our relationship to God.**

We do not know the presence of God. Not that we deny God. Various polls suggest that belief in God is held by a vast majority of our citizens. But

somehow or another, our lifestyle has destroyed, for many of us, the sense of God's reality. The sense of his presence. The awesomeness of a burning bush. The thrill of the voice of God.

So perhaps the lack of prayer, the lack of the need for prayer, is related to a prayer condition. With high technology, with all the kinds of effects that we can put on TV, tape and CDs, we can simulate the awesomeness of God and we realize that that's not God. The panorama of human mystique, suspicion, superstition, fear, awe has so been obscured by our abilities to explain everything and even capture it on film or tape, to reproduce the most horrible expressions of nature and man that the words of the Old Testament, as primitive as they are, about God and his judgment don't phase us any longer. God has somehow been pushed back, back and back. Maybe the probes out into space and you remember a rather rye remark by some of the cosmonauts, when they went up there, they didn't find God up there.

Maybe God has been pushed away and heaven is no longer there. Maybe, subconsciously, we have yielded to our conscious conclusions that prayer is not necessary. So how can one pray if there's nothing to pray to? Today I would like to share with you prayers of others. Perhaps by listening carefully, we can sense what their assumptions were and are. Jesus, in his teachings, urged the life of prayer, a life of prayer on his followers and felt that the place of worship was principally and essentially the house of prayer. The criterium for successful church, and for perhaps evaluating our own churches today, was not that the church building be a center of good works and fellowship, but a center of prayer. Jesus, Himself, drove out the moneychangers. I don't know how he would evaluate our churches today. It was church folk who were as much interested as anybody in getting gambling started in this state, beginning with Bingo, for good works.

If Jesus were here, would he say, my house is not a house of Bingo, it is a house of prayer? Jesus also emphasized the necessity for a personal prayer life. Taking time to retreat out of the hubbub and to find one's self alone with God. Find for one's self the opportunity to evaluate with God one's own life's intentions and performances. Paul also urged prayer by Christians for all aspects of life, including the secular life. Particularly did he urge the leaders of the church to be about prayer. He said, pray without ceasing. He also said to give thanks in everything and constantly. He urged constant prayer throughout the day's activities. What a standard. Before we start in the midst and before we conclude any sort of relationship, we lift it up to God and say, God, guide me. May I do your will in this situation. Perhaps some of the most ancient prayers, which have influenced us as much as anything, are the traditional Hebrew Jewish Passover prayers, which always began in the Seder or the Passover, this period into which was soon coming, with this prayer.

"Blessed art Thou, Lord our God. Ruler of the universe, who sanctifies us with

thy commandments. Blessed art Thou, Lord our God, ruler of the universe, who has sanctified us and has given us life and sustenance, and has brought to us this happy season." Every prayer in the Passover lifts up has brought to us this happy season. Think what this does to one. To thank God, not only for deliverance and everything else, but the happy season.

Or another Jewish prayer, the Mourner's Prayer. Those of you who've been to Synagogue, have been touched by this period. When those persons who have lost a loved one and suffered in the recent time, doing a longer period of mourning than perhaps we had to entertain, are the ones who particularly cite and for whom the recitation and the caddish, or the Mourner's Prayer is employed.

"Almighty and eternal Father, in adversity as in joy, Thou, our source of life are ever with us. As we recall with affection those whom Thou has summoned unto Thee We thank Thee for the example of their lives, for our sweet companionship with them. For the cherished memories and undying inspiration that they leave behind. In tribute to our departed, who are bound with Thee in the bond of everlasting life, may our lives be consecrated to Thy service. Comfort, we pray Thee, all the more. Though they may not comprehend Thy purpose, keep steadfast their trust in thy wisdom. Do Thou, oh God, give them strength in bitter sorrow and sustain their faith in Thee, as they rise to sanctify their name."

So we have a great inheritance and no one can deny that even in this busy day, when life ends for someone close to us, we are brought up short. How terrible it must be for those, who must face these conditions not in faith, and who cannot recite such a prayer in such triumph and in such celebration.

We, this morning, pray the prayer of great tradition. The Lord's Prayer, which is fundamental and normative, which, if we look at it in detail, involves our total life and our basic needs and, at the same time, has a cosmic reference relating to God's Kingdom here on earth. We see in the midst of our own worship service, the centrality of the Lord's Supper, where we give thanks to God for his own initiative, on our behalf, to lift us out of our deep impersonalization and to make our life very personal. Each of us is worth dying for and that is what God has said in the Lord's Supper. Now in the celebration of the Lord's Supper, there are two traditions of prayer that have come to us. One is the tradition of Saint Hippolytus, which emphasizes the death of Christ on our behalf. Paul, and the first three Gospels tend to emphasize this.

The other tradition is the ancient Egyptian liturgy and the Didache, which means "teaching", which is one of the earliest documents we have of church work. In this Egyptian tradition, it emphasizes the return of the Lord to fellowship with his followers and the breaking of bread at a meal time. It is the

latter tradition which I feel is most important to us. That in prayer life, we pray to God, because Jesus has taught us what God is like and Jesus does not leave us alone in our worship and prayer. He is with us at the meal time, the center of our existence.

Jesus appeared after resurrection, except for the walk on the road to Emmaus, to his followers at meal time. In the ancient prayers, there was the Aramaic word "Maranatha," which means, "Lord come." So in the prayer life, we're actually inviting Jesus to stay with us, to be with us, to accompany us. In the Byzantine liturgy, at the elevation of the Host, the words are, "Come Thou, who are seated on high with the Father, who are invisibly present among us." which is the acknowledgment that Jesus is present. One of the oldest German graces before meals is "-Kommen Sie, essen mit uns." Come you, eat with us. How many of us still today invite Christ to every one of our meals, every meal being a communion.

In the monastic practice, the office of prime, there was a hymn, which was a prayer hymn, which said, "Now the daylight fills the sky. We lift our hearts to God on high, that He, in all we do or say, would keep us free from harm today. All praise, all laud to God the Father be. All praise eternal Son to Thee. All glory as is ever meet, to God, the Holy Paraclete"

Or, we can go to a prayer, which began at a men's school in the east, Harvard, in the chapel. A sort of secular prayer, in a way, and goes, "Oh Lord, the protector of our lives, Thou have shielded us while we slept. And in Thy mercy has waken us once more. May we take up our duties with glad and willing minds, so that whatever tasks the day may demand of us, we may do them with cheerfulness, that whatever joys the day may bring, we may receive them gladly. That whatever's left undone at evening time, may be committed to another day. Amen."

In the more modern monastic communities, the Tasse community in southern France, an ecumenical monastery and an Anglican community. From them, I give you an evening prayer. "Oh Lord, support us all day long of this troublesome life, until the shadows take them and the evening comes. And the busy world is hushed and the fever of life is over and our work us done. Then in Thine mercy, grant us a safe launching and Thy holy rest and peace at the last. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

There are prayers that are even more modern. At the ecumenical Inter denominational chapel at the Brussels World Fair, there is this prayer that I read. "Quicken Thy Church with Thine own spirit. That we may truly be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, opposing everywhere the power of evil and exercising the influence of the true Christian spirit. Amen

1 800 403 4357 (GOD HELPS)
Covenant Christian Church
February 22, 1987

Scripture Luke 11:1-13

It's interesting, as I look at the present day, how much pressure is on us to keep in contact with each other. The competition between long distance lines is amazing, as they talk about the fidelity of their particular facility to send your voice all around the world, so that you might keep in touch. In fact, we have the traditional slogan of one of them that says, "reach out and touch someone." So realistic is this contact that it is as though you were actually touching someone.

The whole advantages of the touch-tone telephone, which allows you to send various coded sound signals, which can produce all sorts of harnessing of vast, computer arrangements, with all our deposits of knowledge, and not only deposits of knowledge, but whole forces that can react and carry out your wishes is boggling of the mind.

To realize that with digital reproduction, the high fidelity, which allows us to reproduce the voice so well that persons who produce the compact disc are worried stiff that that same sort of process can allow those discs to become copied on tapes, so that there's no loss of fidelity. The whole pressure today is to reproduce our ability to communicate and to "can" it and replicate it. In fact, it is possible now, if you want to, to dial a prayer. Just imagine what you could do. You get your little home computer all set up, to three times a day, dial a prayer. So what you could have is your automated spiritual, what shall I say, robot. Wouldn't that be wonderful?

What you could do is just take off today and go fishing. I could record a whole years' sermons and you could put it into your program and you could have the sermon come right into your home and there it could be reproduced by the very best equipment and you could have it on tape. In the meantime, you could do anything else. Then what you could do is have a small crematorium, with an automatic machine that would take that tape at an appropriate time, pick it up, move it into that little blast furnace and there burn it as a sweet incense up to God. Think. Wouldn't that be wonderful to have a modern method for religious worship? Isn't that something? It's almost boggling of the mind to think that we can have, maybe we wouldn't even need churches any more. We could have all this religion going on and somehow manage to satisfy ourselves and still be free to do something else.

Last time, we discussed prayer. Generally dwelling on the posture of prayer, particularly in relationship to kneeling. Which reminds me of a Bishop, who took out a young minister with him on his circuit. It was some decades ago, as you will see. They ran into a blizzard, a snow storm, and their progress was being impeded and it looked as though they would not be able to reach their destination. They saw a light by the side of the road and they pulled off and went into the farmhouse and said to the dear couple there, we are on our way to such and such church. We cannot make it. Could you put our team of horses up for the night and us also? They said, certainly, and the horses were put in the barn and fed and the Bishop and the young minister were fed. Then they were ushered up to the garret, or the attic, where there was an extra bed.

The Bishop proceeded very rapidly to strip down to his underwear and jump in under the feather blanket. The young minister was filled with consternation. He couldn't understand and he stood kind of at unease and finally he said to the Bishop, sir, don't you think we should kneel by the bed and say our prayers before we go into bed? The Bishop cocked one eye out from under that blanket and he said to him, son, I keep prayed ahead for situations just like this one. He kept something in the prayer bank. Or as a little boy and how often I felt like praying this prayer, "Please God, could you put the vitamins in pie and cake, instead of cod liver oil and spinach?"

Today we want to think further about prayer. We want to give some consideration to the origins of Christian prayer and also to the condition of the person who would pray. Christian prayer came directly from the Jewish tradition. This included regularity of prayer and included frequency of prayer, as well as special occasions. The focus of prayer, however, was praise. Praise and thanksgiving to God for His mighty acts. The basic prayer for Judaism was the benediction. But not the benediction as we're used to it. It was not asking of God's blessing on one's own departure or somebody else's departure, but the benediction, the good speaking, was a speaking about God. The blessing that He had given to them. God was being thanked for his watchful care and being praised for his mighty acts in creation and his constant redeeming of his people out of trouble. Only then, and not as frequently, was the petition, or intercession, or confession of sin. Following that might be a Doxology with an Amen. The Amen meaning, so may this be. The Doxology being similar to what you said after the Lord's Prayer. The windup of the Lord's Prayer as we pray it..

It's interesting that after the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., the Rabbis concluded and instructed their people that prayer was more important than sacrifice. As one wrote, the offering of the lips, is as sweet smelling to God as incense at the sacrifice. Jesus used Jewish acts of worship and prayer to instruct and to direct the prayer life of his followers. His

guidance in prayer life can be seen in the Scripture. From that, we see that Jesus went customarily to the synagogue to teach and to pray, as well as to the Temple.

It is also apparent that he went away alone to pray. He prayed in emergencies. He prayed before great decisions, as well as regularly. Jesus's teachings reveal much about the prayer life of his day and the guidance and the prayer life he gave to his followers included such guidance as, prayer should not be for show and pompous expression he condemned. He also condemned pretentious prayers.

He pointed out that self-righteousness nullifies prayers. Remember the illustration of the publican and of the sinner. He urged his followers to pray with trust in God, not to ask for signs that the prayer had been heard or would be granted. He said, don't test God and don't proposition Him saying, "God if you do this for me, then I'll do this for you."

He also pointed out that anxiety was a hindrance to prayer. "The lilies of the valley, they sow not, neither do they reap, but still, God in His goodness clothes them in beauty. So do not be anxious," said Jesus.

Jesus taught that we must have faith in the power of God in us. Such faith would move mountains, and he also said, keep asking, but don't be cocky. He also said, before any period of test and struggle, pray for strength to meet that test. He taught that by all means, one should set one's own life in order. We must forgive others and practice forgiving before coming to God for forgiveness.

Yes, he said, commune with God with no distraction. Remember that God knows our needs, even before we ask. Remember also, that He gives to us out of His grace, which means He is not compelled by our merit or deserving, to answer our prayers, but He responds to our needs, particularly when we seek them within the context of seeking the fulfillment of His Kingdom here on earth.

Now, how should we go about praying? There are certain prerequisites. The first is, to begin, even if we cannot really believe, with the assumption that God is. Prayer is based upon the assumption that there's more to life than myself. There's greater power than that which I, or any other human being, can possess.

So we begin, if we cannot in faith, begin with the assumption that God is and the quality of our prayer life then deepens as we go on the quest of understanding what God is as our concepts of God deepen and flesh out.

Jesus prayed to God as a Father. A loving Father. In fact, God in His essence was love. The concept of the nature of God determines how and what one prays. If God is understood as friendly, as a loving parent full of grace, forgiving but not indulgent, but always caring, then our prayers are such, as to mold us into an understanding of God's will for us. Our life takes on meaning and the problems which beseech us, fall in their place and we have strength to meet them.

If, on the other hand, God is a magic-maker, prayer becomes a fetish. We make the sign of the cross to warn off the devil or evil, as a boxer does as he goes into the ring, makes a sign of the cross. Or God is viewed as a Santa Clause, who grants wealth and the many toys and things of this earth. How often this is the level of our prayer, oh God, I need a new car. Show me somehow how to get a new car.

What shall we say about the condition of the person who prays? We've said, first of all, we've got to believe that God exists. Secondly, we must prepare ourselves, which means, in a sense, within ourselves we must examine and make confession. Confession of our own weaknesses, inadequacies and omissions. Within our heart forgive and I know how hard that is, because there have been things in my own life which have hurt awfully deeply. Many of those have come from fellow pastors and and colleagues. But what a relief it was to be able to rise about it and to forgive.

We do not do much of the preparation of our bodies for prayer anymore, but in the olden times, people fasted. I want to say that a full meal, sometimes the ones that we get in beautiful potluck suppers at the church, does not necessarily bring on the condition and the desire to pray. I think, instead, if there are any sounds, there are sounds of burping and a desire to sleep.

No, there are important aspects of the preparation of our physical selves and perhaps it's just as well we are not preoccupied for a period with satisfying physical needs. Maybe a time of fasting would be well before praying. Then the person begins with thanksgiving in their heart, that they can come to God, that there is a God for them to come to. They draw near and maybe draw physically near. Maybe you have someplace where you go, or maybe you just bring your soul near God, with confidence and a true heart. In that situation, whether one expects it or not, God is there and is responding to the seeker. Don't worry about words. The Holy Spirit of God teaches us how to pray and intervenes on our behalf. Don't be afraid of silence. Silence is a fundamental form of prayer for God. Jesus said, quoting in a sense his Father, "Be still and know that I'm God."

What shall we say about the mechanics of prayer that we have not already said? Anyplace, but certainly the church. Jesus has said, this is a house of prayer for all peoples, as he drove the tax collectors out. It's probably important, as I said about fasting. The Jews washed their bodies and went through certain ceremonies. That's how we got baptism. In preparation to make themselves sufficiently holy. What would it do to us, if we actually showered and cleaned off and prepared ourselves and adorned ourselves with clean clothes, simple clothes. Left off all the makeup, all the underarm and just were a natural body to God.

Maybe that would do something to us, if we deliberately prepared ourselves to pray. Certainly we must withdraw from the hurly burly. If we can't do it physically, if we can't get away from the sounds of life, at least withdraw our minds and souls. Our minds today are trashed with the trivia of today's mass media, which fills up all the time spaces, leaving no time for a prayer or for God. Just think, the sports, the soaps, the romances, the fishing shows, the game shows. There's more time at the evening meal spent watching Wheel of Fortune, than praying. What would happen if we reversed it and we spent that whole half hour praying and 10 seconds watching the Wheel of Fortune.

Oh, I know, there's a way to get around that. We can get the prayer in, if the meal starts in in the midst of this process, we can wait for the advertising and get a quick prayer into God, if you've forgotten about that.

Oh, I suppose we could say, in light of the scripture last Sunday, watch and pray. You pray and I'll watch. Prayer is based not only the preparation of the person, but is also based on developing a habit, a regularity and a frequency. Morning, noon and night, at meals, before trips, before conferences in the office.

The posture may be standing, kneeling, prostrate. One thing we don't do but we see our Pentecostal brethren do is the lifting of hands in prayer. As you see it in the mass media, you said, what are those quirky people doing? That's Biblical, In the Psalms. and in Jewish practice. You should try that posture and see what it does for you.

In terms of contriteness, something we don't know, but in the old days, they would sigh, "Oh God." In Jewish Passover experience, the beating of the breast is still there. God forgive me, a sinner. The downcast eyes expressed humility.

In the mechanics of prayer, the preparation of one's own person and attitude is perhaps important. It's just so easy to say, well thank you, God or to have an invocation before every sort of gathering, as sort of a fetish.

Paul urged constant prayer and thanksgiving for all things and all circumstances. You see, it's important that we keep our spiritual battery charged. We have all sorts of tools and shavers and all that sort of thing that are cordless. But you know what happens when you keep them away from the charger and don't put them back in there. You pick them up and they're dead. I wonder if that isn't what's happening to us spiritually.

We also have machines that are greased for their life but, you know, we're not greased when we're born. We're a machine that has to keep the oil changed, the catalytic of prayer, so that our lives can function and also to remember about the priority of prayer.

It's very interesting to me, as we deal with voice communication today, particularly in the new cars, you step into them and all of a sudden a voice comes out and says, your tank's half full. Or it may say, your tank's too full. Your breath has alcohol in it, speaking of which tank. It may say, your brake is on. It might even say, you're loaded, don't drive. It might say, I'm sorry, your car won't start, because you have to breathe in the ignition. Now I understand that pet shop people are training monkeys that you take along with you to breathe in for you when you're loaded, so you can get into your car. That's one reason an alcohol test of that sort won't work. It's interesting to me that we work so hard to have our voices, or other voices, to prepare us for the things we want to do, driving the car and other kinds of things. But somehow or another, we don't want to have a voice of God coming into our lives.

There was an old hymn we used to sing, "Err you left your room this morning, did you think to pray?" I'm telling you friends, we're doing all sorts of maneuvers with modern technology, to guarantee that we will be able to carry out, with less labor, with greater efficiency, even the making of war. But somehow or another, we don't want to do the simple, natural things to keep in contact with the real source of strength that makes life worthwhile and makes us able to live it.

We must also be mindful of the propriety of prayers. I know that we felt very good during World War II when we sang the song, Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition. I'm sure God Himself must have had some real trouble with us at that time. He must have said, hmm, I wonder whether I should really be passive. Taking their praise and helping them pass the ammunition.

Somehow or another, a so-called Christian nation, such as ours boosts its morale by saying, we've got the enemy of that **atheistic**, Communist, Russian, Soviet Union.

We forget about the Old Testament, where God used the Assyrians and the Babylonians against His very chosen people. Here we sit in smugness, forgetting that if we really had faith in God and pray to Him, we should have some propriety about our prayers. We should have prayed earlier, for his will. We should remember the teaching about the mote in somebody else's eye, versus the beam in our own eye.

We should remember to pray to God in strength and not just in weakness. Churches or denominations that try to bless the world, give invocations over all sorts of secular affairs, including even our Congress and our Legislature, are churches that too easily adapt to the world. On the other hand, persons who take the mystical route and check out from this evil world and try to get clear away, in some cave or some community, and drop out. They, too, pray a selfish prayer that they, in their holiness, can escape the world and be not of it. Or a religious community can pray for God's will and His kingdom and for the strength evangelically to bring others into the community, where they can maintain a strict standards and a goal for quality of life and behavior. In that strict standard, then have the kind of discipline to reach out to help and to serve others.

So as we think about prayer this morning, we must think of our personal attitudes. Not cocky, not self-righteous, but humble and confessing and receptive to God's will. We must remember that the leverage point is outside of one's self. It's outside of one's self in the strength of God, which gives us faith to move mountains. Which enables us to say, as Paul did, I am able to do all things through Him who strengthens me. Those things which work for God's kingdom. The answer to any prayer, we must remember, is God's initiative. So the prayer that one makes is the process of discovering God's will for us and, therefore, what we really need. Prayer is not magic. It is, in essence, communion with God and acceptance of His will and yielding in total obedience.

Richard Trench expressed it in these words, "Lord, what a change within us one short hour spent in thy presence will avail to make. What heavy burdens from our bosoms take. What parched grounds as fresh as with a shower, we kneel and all around us seems to lower, we rise in awe, the distant and the near stands forth in sunny outline, brave and clear. We kneel how weak. We rise how full of power. Why, therefore, should we do ourselves this wrong, or others that we are not always strong. That we are sometimes over born with care, that we should ever weak or heartless be, anxious or troubled, when with us is prayer and joy and strength and courage are with Thee."

May Flowers

Covenant Christian Church

Scripture: Song of Solomon 2:10-14

An interesting thing happened a couple days ago. Our daughter pulled up and an eager little child jumped out of the car. As he came out of the car, he dumped something, stopped, reached down and picked it up and put it back in a little basket with pieces of candy and popcorn, came up the sidewalk and said, "Happy May Day." as he gave me a May basket.

As he came up, he learned from grandmother a tradition. When you deliver May baskets, the recipient tries to catch and kiss you. That is, you kiss them if you can catch them. How many of you have that kind of tradition? How many of you older people go the next door widow lady and leave her a May basket. Older men? Men walk very decrepitly away saying, "No, we don't do that, anymore". Ah, maybe you do, I don't know.

The youngsters catch on to that idea of doing something nice. Even as my little grandson gave me the basket and then took it away and gave it to grandmother, I could see in his eye that glint, may I have a piece of that candy in the May basket. So he took it from me, because he knew grandmother was softer, at least in that area, than grandfather. She may dispute that, by the way. May time is a time of new beginnings. Of genuine renewal. It's a time to be aware of the earthliness, the earthiness of creation and the interdependence of all creatures and this includes humanity. Somehow or another, we may fall away from that recognition, with the high rises, the vast square miles of concrete and asphalt, the mechanized travel, the supermarket, the quick foods. All of this mesmerizes us into thinking that we really don't need nature, particularly with the computer age. But actually nature and religion are inextricably bound together. Much of our basic religious instinct comes from the cycle of nature. The Psalms extol the creative role of God and Jesus's figures of speech drew quite frequently on the agricultural or the pastoral scene.

The Old Testament, if you read it carefully and thoroughly, is quite earthy and reminds us constantly of our own earthiness. At the same time, it separates us out from all of creation and points out that the human being, in and of creation is, nevertheless, distinct from it. The human being is a person, with one foot on the earth, with all the basic passions of earthiness and one foot in Heaven, thinking heavenly thoughts. Yet somehow or another, we have allowed Paul's teachings against the extremes of his day, to have been taken on by devout followers of Christianity, to the extreme of denying the earthly foot and in this separation, other people deny the heavenly foot. Spirit and flesh are put in a dichotomy, a dualism, an antagonism. Spirit and flesh. The

divine and the earthly. The temporal and the eternal are pitted against each other. Instead of leavening each other to our greater good, we have made war within our two natures, leaving the impression that the twain shall not be one.

Today I would emphasize that earthly nature of our being, and you shall see that you cannot have one without the other. May flowers are a certain sign of spring. A walk in native woods reveals the wildflowers, the violets, the buttercups, the lambs tongue, the Dutchman's britches, May flowers, May apple and on and on, we could name many more. This lets us know that deep beneath the dry, brown of winter's time, exposed by melting snow, are all sorts of life, plant life and animal life, scurrying up, bursting forth. The surprise is that almost overnight from nothing there, a Jack in the Pulpit springs up. The question comes to us as we move into the spring, what of ourselves? How many of you already this spring have gone out into the woods hoping somehow you might share in the thrill of finding that elusive Morel mushroom. After spending several hours looking and looking and looking, because they don't yell at you, they just suddenly appear as a vision and then disappear. As you closed your eyes that evening, what you saw was a fantasy, that just simply almost makes anything else step away. For all of a sudden behind every brown leaf and under every log, Morel's are just coming out at you. But where were they when you were looking for them?

You hear the birds singing and you notice the Robins are already hatching and the little ones are sending their parents scurrying to satisfy insatiable appetites. New birth is all around. Frisky lambs and little doggies, and I don't mean little puppies, all about us in this land we see new life. There is a book in the Old Testament, which causes consternation. Read literally, it reveals the depth of carnal and passionate love. The euphoria of newly betrothed on through the so-called honeymoon is revealed. The seeking of fulfillment of the selfhood in another, through bodily embrace, is fully expressed. The verses I read, few of us could match in eloquence. In fact, if we dared to speak with such eloquence, and in such fashion meaning what is behind all those words, we might be accused of being under the influence of Eros, the goddess of erotic love.

The question comes to us and I'm not speaking to anybody in particular here, I'm looking in the mirror. If it slops over and hits you, so be it. How can one maintain that joy and verve and devotion and high appreciation and interdependence in a human relationship, particularly in one's marriage. This is the time of year for many marriages, particularly the planning of them. When June comes busting out all over, so do bridal couples. How much do we hope that in each case the glow will not diminish, but last forever.

Last night, as I intimated before, I attended the 50th anniversary of my wife's high school graduation. There were those there that had already celebrated, or are about to celebrate, their 50th wedding anniversary. When I looked at the husbands, in the cases when they were acknowledged, I wondered how did she do it? But when I looked in the mirror subsequently, I wondered how my wife was doing it. I knew how I was doing it. Looking at the ladies present, I was reinforced in my belief that I was very lucky, and was married to the best looking, most talented, tenderest, most self-giving person there in that room. It was reinforced by the greetings she received from others, male and female, the high regard in which she was held. You see why I'm glad she's not here this morning. I'd never be able to live with her would I? Oh yes I would.

The initial spark of the first invitation to arise and come away into a new relationship, kept alive by many little words and deeds, is so important. How will we do these little words and little deeds, to enhance and keep alive the growth? It requires personal attention of a tender and loving kind. Not just sharp and judgmental words. It's so easy when we're with each other all the time to treat each other as though we were ourselves. I think that's where it comes from, because basically we become upset with ourselves and we let it flow out on another. The closest one is the one we're living with. We have to maintain the art of stroking and touching, with cleanliness of bodily condition. You men know what a one day's growth of beard does to a lady's face and you ladies know what 1/8 inch cover of "lard" does to a man's face. Only you don't use lard, you use the latest hormone creams, don't you? Evidently, I'm striking home, you know what I'm talking about.

April showers may bring May flowers, but men, indifference, silence or harsh words are not April showers and you cannot expect a tender response after such relationships with your spouse. Dwelling close and beholding, we think so much of ourselves and pains that we do not leave room for our partner's pains. We must dwell close, but on the other hand we must leave room. We must leave respect for each other's space, sensing the time when smothering is counter-productive and somehow a walk alone can give a new perspective.

I'm not adverse to advocating separate vacations occasionally. For somehow or another, parents need to get away from each other and that's what grandparents are for, to babysit the children, while parents go away together and occasionally go away separately.

It's important to remember that forgiveness is not just a thing to be preached from the pulpit but to practice in the home. There's no level of limit on forgiveness if we follow the Lord, for He said, 70 times 7, which, my friends, means for eternity. No limit. It's very important to be in a position of being

able to forgive and enable a new starting point. I know it's awfully hard to say, "I forgive." It's important, though, in a difficult forgiving situation, to have a third person in it. Both acknowledging the presence of God, It is possible to have a representative of God, the minister or devout counselor, to witness or make real the forgiving relationship. It's important to say nice things to each other. Oh, I know. I say nice things. My wife may say something like this, "Oh go on, I don't believe a word you say, but I like it." It's important to say nice things, and particularly if you can pick that time when something nice can reverse the trend of adversity. You have to be sensitive to know when those times are.

Particularly is it important to eliminate public dispute. Never discuss anything that might have some adversarial or disputing nature in the presence of anybody else. Minimize any sort of intense discussion or dispute before the children. Never publicly put one or the other down. That is very destructive of personality and of relationships. Incidentally bosses, that's true of people with whom you work. If you have something of a negative nature, do it in private. With my own parents, I would hear murmuring in the bedroom, never was there any dispute before the children. Mother would wait and when they were alone quietly they would discuss it. The next morning, how often would be the day before dad would have said to a child, that's the end, no more of that. The next day, under certain provisos, there would be "more of that." Mother alone with Dad had her say. If there had been a dispute right there in the presence of the child, it would have destroyed the father's discipline and the mother's control of the children. It's very important to maintain privacy between the parents and the loved ones of any disputes. In all disputes, never do it on empty stomachs or late at night. It just doesn't work out. The biological being produces a person that's not totally human. See that the creature is comfortable and then objectively discuss things.

In terms of objectifying the issue, "Well you said," I would not say. Time after time when we try to define the issue, it disappears. One could go on and on and on. The thing we need to realize is that human relations are more physical than we realize. They involve the tender touch. We see a little bit of it today as you see signs saying, have you hugged somebody today? I'm always tickled because my son being a trucker, there's a sign that says, have you hugged a trucker today? Some of those truckers are pretty big to get your arms around. In the old country, you were really in when you are embraced. In Russia, you receive also a triune kiss. Somehow or another, we are rather uptight about recognizing that we are real human beings with emotions, with passions, with hunger, with desire, and loneliness. Those infants that are raised without the close, snuggling with a mother, may have personalities which are caricatured and distraught. A child must at least have a nanny that's close.

It's very, very important that we realize that we're all children and we never can really suffice without the touching and the stroking. The persons who hide away in the cells of the deserts of Egypt, to get clear away from all carnal aspects, from my point of view, are not doing honor to God or to their religion, but have egos that are caricatured. In spite of the fact that later they are listed as saints, many of them. The old polarization between flesh and spirit should be rejected. Rather, the spirit feeds the flesh and the flesh feeds the spirit.

In marriage, or in all human relations, the way of peace does not just happen, it must be the result of vigilance and effort. A ruined marriage is destruction with lasting consequences in human behavior for generations spoiling the social genes of a whole community. For here's where the foot on earth is leavened by the heavenly foot. For where two dwell together and God makes a third, then the spirit of God blesses that relationship, until death does it part. Love is a many splendored thing for it begins with God and goes through all of his creation. That was His intention. It was Elizabeth Barrett Browning who said, "Earth is crammed with heaven and every common bush aflame with God."

A Certain Lady
 Mother's Day Sermon
 Covenant Christian Church
 May 10, 1987

My mother died at quite a young age and so she is not here to tell the stories about me that she could, which would keep me from being too sentimental about her, perhaps. I know she had a very trying time trying to rear me. Sometimes she literally did, from the seat of my pants.

But I've chosen today to tell you a story about a certain lady. I have a complete manuscript, so I will not be improvising quite as much as I generally do. I'd like to have you just share along with the story of this certain lady and we'll see where we come out.

This is the day motherhood and individual mothers are honored. As it has ever been, these also are times and circumstances when parenting seems impossible. Yet, I would insist that with proper motivation and relying on

spiritual resources, all things are possible. Even under the most trying of conditions.

To this end this morning, I would share with you the story of a certain lady. There she was, boarding a steamship of the Dollar Line, sailing from Vancouver, British Columbia with her husband, her small son and her five and a half month old baby daughter. They would be three weeks on the Pacific Ocean, going by way of Japan and China, to serve on the mission field in a distant land and a foreign land. What had brought her to this day?

She was born in Brown County, Illinois, September 30, 1893, the youngest of four, in a little cabin at the end of the lane on a large farm where her father, a hired hand, worked for his grandmother. Soon they were to move to a neighboring county on 160 acres purchased by her father from savings and a modest inheritance.

She was tutored early by her school teacher mother and her older sisters. Her brother, with her father, did the farm work and her sisters helped with the domestic chores. So she found time to read and fantasize, stroll in the forest and along the creek bank, as well as to play house by drawing the outline of rooms in the dry dirt on the south side of the smokehouse, even on sunny winter days.

In the country school, she soon was to master the lessons of all eight grades and began assisting the teacher tutoring her schoolmates. During those school days, during a winter recess period as she came around the corner of the schoolhouse, she was hit full in the mouth by a snowball, thrown in anger in a vicious fight between young boys. She was an innocent recipient of the snowball. Only inside the ball was a hard cinder. Her lips were mangled and her front teeth left broken and jagged.

There were not adequate funds, nor persons of skill to fix her teeth and for years she held her handkerchief in front of her mouth. Eventually her father saved up enough to fix up her teeth in grand style and she was able to flash a broad, golden smile, which with eyes revealing the depth of soul, mixed with an almost impish glint and a vocabulary that conveyed instant and meaningful communication, drew persons into her circle of influence. To no one's surprise, she topped the scores for the eighth grade in the Illinois state examinations. She moved to town to enter and finish high school, where again she excelled, not only academically, but in extracurricular activity, including declamation, drama, debate and five-person basketball. Again, she topped the state with a perfect score in the state examinations for high school seniors.

The catalyst in her family life was the Christian faith pursued in the country chapels and deepened by home Bible study and prayer. Already the American dream of spreading Christianity and democracy around the world was capturing the young. The American West was won and "The world for Christ, in one generation," was the theme song of her generation.

She participated fully in the growing role of women in public life and advocacy, by campaigning for the 19th Amendment and the right to vote. She received a full scholarship to a newly-founded college 100 miles from her home. She continued to excel, filling positions as laboratory assistant and instructor. She was active in the college YWCA, which at that time emphasized the C, as well as the health of mind and body. She continued in basketball and tennis. In her junior year, she was smitten by a football player. He was active in the YMCA and was going into the ministry of the Christian church. They were married the next June, stayed out of school the next year and served a Mississippi river bottom church, where their first born was brought forth.

They finished their senior year at a Christian church college from which a future president was later to graduate. During that year, they served a rural church and lived in its parsonage, not far from the campus. After graduation, her husband went to the School of Missions at Butler University in Indianapolis, Indiana. She returned to her parents' farm, to await the birth of her second child. Five months later, she was on her way to the mission field.

They lived and worked in the capital city of the mission land. Her husband, first, Dean of the Bible College and later, in charge of evangelism in the Tagalog-speaking area of Luzon of the Philippines. She soon was teaching English literature in the large university in that city. After her classes, she offered extracurricular studies in English Bible from whose members came future leaders of the country. She also was an advocate of an enhanced role for women in the professions and in public service in that land.

After three years, the family returned home. The father's health had failed and she came back, facing possible widowhood. It took several disciplined years for him to regain his health. In the meantime, she went through major surgery and bore two more children. Yet her home was maintained with a vigor that belied the fact that she had severe allergic reactions, giving her frequent bold hives and migraine headaches. Her power to cope, since she weighed less than 100 pounds most of her life, was in prayer and an abiding faith in the love of God.

The family, in practice, included prayers at meal time, Bible study each day and bedtime prayers. The family life was also enriched by reading aloud, not only from the Bible, but from secular sources. Some of the reading was from

memory. The children would listen with deep suspense, as she recited James Whitcomb Riley's poem,

"Little Orphan Annie Come to Our House to Stay. We sat around the kitchen fire and has the mostest fun and listened to the witch tells, as Annie tells about, and the goblins will get you if you don't watch out."

Also Riley's word picture, "When the frost is on the pumpkin and the fodder's in the shock was unforgettable." The poignant mood, set by Eugene Field's, Little Boy Blue, introduced the children to the tragedy of death for even the young, as she recited "the little toy dog is covered with dust." In the words of Francis Bourdillon, she painted a vivid picture, "The night has a thousand eyes and the day but one, yet the light of the bright world dies with the dying sun. The mind has a thousand eyes and the heart but one. Yet the light of a whole life dies when love is done."

She taught a lesson in Robert Frost's poem, which ended each verse with, "but let me live by the side of the road and be a friend to man." Each spring it seemed appropriate for her children to hear her recite Williams Wordsworth, "I wandered lonely as a cloud that floats on high on vale and hills, when all at once I saw a crowd, a host, of golden daffodils." Longfellow's poem, with its alliteration, gained attention as she shared this poem on Hiawatha's childhood, "By the shores of Gitche Gumee, by the shining big sea water." She fulfilled Edgar A. Guest's poem, "It takes a heap of living', in a house to make a home."

Although she could make vivid Field's dual of the Gingham Dog and the Calico Cat, she soon challenged her family with more serious poems. James Russell Lowell's, The Present Crisis, whose lines in the last verse include, "New occasions teach new duties; Time makes ancient good uncouth; They must upward still, and onward, who would keep abreast of Truth."

She sensitized her family with the reading of Thomas Hood's, Song of the Shirt. The last verse kept ringing in their ears. "With fingers weary and worn, with eyelids heavy and red, a woman sat in unwomanly rags, plying her needle and thread. Stitch, stitch, stitch, In poverty, hunger and dirt. And still with a voice of dolorous pitch, would it's tone could reach the rich, she sang the song of the shirt."

Her teaching also had the powers of attention-getting and negative reinforcement. She used such devices as vocal admonition, chair sitting for contemplation and cooling off. Even the ruler, or the back of the hairbrush on the palm of the hand. At times she would appeal to the Supreme Court, the father's razor strap in his hand, to back her up, which, accordingly, did not happen often.

But the main emphasis was togetherness. The family took part in tenting vacations in northern Minnesota. This lady went from a rural background, drawing on all sorts of skills and knowledge. She organized the family so that it was kept clean and dry, rested and fed. They learned to live off the resources of the land, fish of all kinds, berries, including blueberries, thimbleberries, sarvis berries, pin and choke cherries, wild hazelnuts and wild rice from the Indians and produce from local gardens and milk from local farmers. Recreational interests included hiking, swimming, games of hide and seek, duck on the rock and other activities cementing togetherness.

This lady was in constant attendance to family needs in sickness or in health. But she insisted on teaching independence and acceptance of responsibility. The children were taught to cook, clean up after meals. Clean not only their rooms, but the whole house. Tend the furnace. Do the washing. Practice music and above all, complete each night's homework before playtime.

The answer to an unsolved, unsolvable mathematical problem would be on the table the next morning, but not the solution. Because mother could do it, the child was challenged to persevere. Her culinary abilities were not lacking. In college she had studied nutrition and in the family, the morning's dose of cod liver oil was offset by the evening's freshly baked angel food cake. She knew how to take an old hen and bake it to perfection for Sunday dinner. Birthdays and holidays were special and all her talents were brought to bear to see that these became meaningful events for the whole family, and were celebrated significantly, as well as soberly.

She saw her children through their education, treating each accomplishment in such fashion as to encourage each child, but not let their ego expand disproportionately. All preparation was for the purpose not to be successful or wealthy, but to serve one's fellows, carrying out the stewardship God had given each one.

Her energies were not completely directed to her family. She always taught a popular Sunday School class, was active in women's groups in the church she and her husband served. You see, she was not only a college-educated lady, she was an ordained clergy person, along with her husband. After the mission field, they served two small town churches and then after a few years, came to the capital city of a Midwestern state. There they took on a mission church.

She also became active in women's groups in the city, particularly those serving the causes of peace and temperance. She and her husband gave long and patient hours to alcoholics and their families. She and her husband were early advocates of law enforcement and the removal of corruption from local government. There were times when they and the family were

threatened and the children were warned to run to the nearest house if anyone attempted to detain them on their way home from school.

This lady would spend all night attending the sick of the parish, and particularly share the death vigil. Into her home came the disgraced pregnant, the abused child, the impoverished sick from the county hospital. She taught them manners, right attitudes and demonstrated the healing power of love. By her own bedside, she maintained a well-worn and read Bible. Also, there were the writings of Glen Clark, a mystic and man of prayer. He had been her college English professor and her husband's football coach.

To her children's occasional chafing during the Depression at the poverty level of ministerial existence, she pointed out that there are treasures, not only in Heaven but also on earth, in the jewels of human relationships and the victories to be won in turning people from selfishness and bickering, to love and peace. She could not carry a tune, but she knew the lyrics, and she could appropriately cite the right verse at the right time to make the point. The verse from the Bible was also extremely useful. Not for legalistic debate, but for illustration of God's love, as revealed in the teachings of Jesus.

She was terribly dismayed when Prohibition was repealed and predicted that alcoholism would increase and drunken driving would be devastating. Even the prenatal influence of drinking mothers would damn the coming generations. Consequently, she, with her husband, left the local parish work to enter full time into temperance work, receiving no income for the first while, because of the disarray of the temperance forces with repeal. They were, however, soon sustained by the presence on their Board, of the owner and publisher of the local newspaper, leading attorneys, businessmen and clergy.

She was remembered as the best lady speaker on peace and temperance in the upper Midwest. One whose presence in any group was so unassuming as to give no indication of the strength of power of her personality. She was self-effacing, thanking God for every opportunity to serve.

During this time, her second major disappointment came with a gathering of war clouds over Europe and the Pacific. Eventually two of her sons went into the service of their country. Her prayers followed them, as well as all the children of all the parents of all the sides who were at war. Her daughter followed her parents' tradition and went into the mission field.

Shortly after the end of the war, after both sons had just returned, she was smitten by an illness, which took her without warning and with great shock to her family. Going back to the bedroom after her funeral, her children found her Bible and books on the power of prayer, testifying, even in the last hours of her consciousness, she was sustained by her faith in God, and her belief

that love and peace are yet the catalysts of human community. Her children carried on, in every case, her tradition of teaching and administration. Three in the public schools and one in a university.

One might feel that this certain lady failed because two of her causes, temperance and peace, did not come in her lifetime. But she would be content with Emily Dickinson, whom oft she quoted. "If I can stop one heart from breaking, I shall not live in vain. If I can ease one life from aching or cool one pain or help one fainting robin into his nest again, I shall not live in vain." Her children continued to hear comments from persons praising her saying, "I was in her Sunday School class. She came when my mother was ill. I remember the time I spent in your home."

She could carry a crowd with her excellently assembled data and well-prepared addresses, plus her ability to use appropriately scripture and poetry. She was one of the many, many unglamorous, non-media-hype persons who made America great.

Fortunately for me, I was privileged to know her quite well. I lived close to her for 22 years. In fact for 22 years and nine months. For I grew up those first nine months within her, as her first born. She was my mother.

A Living Sacrifice
Covenant Christian Church
May 31, 1987

Scripture Romans 12:1-13

The subject this morning is a Living Sacrifice. The word "sacrifice" is ambivalent. It has a mixed meaning. It generally is used in terms of some act, which connotes a noble type of striving or contribution. Last Sunday, observing Memorial Day, we noticed and memorialized those who made the supreme sacrifice on behalf of us all, in terms of the various wars and conflicts of our nation.

We think of religions, particularly the ancient religions, as centered around sacrifice as the main expression of worship. We think of giving up something as a sacrifice. In the ancient religions, that giving up, was actually something being slaughtered. Living creatures, that is, and even human beings. They

were slaughtered, life being given to the god, given back to the god. In order to give life to a god, you must take life.

As we can think about those kinds of practices, we think of them as practices that belong to the past, particularly to cultures that were not as advanced or enlightened in comparison to us. Today we claim that we do not believe in gods that require sacrifices, or that the god we believe in requires sacrifices any longer, since the time of the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross.

Sacrifice then is that which is presented for the purposes of conciliation, atonement, thanksgiving, appreciation, expiation, surrender or emulation. All of these and many others describing the conditions that are attempted to be met in the process of taking of life. Generally, we picture formal places for these kinds of events. Temples or high mountains or alters. We think in terms of bloodletting and fire, as a part of the process.

Such thoughts, if we dwell on them too heavily, are generally repulsive to us today. We are enlightened. We look down on the ancient Aztecs, the Romans, the Greeks, the Old Testament Jews, the Egyptians, the Meads, the Persians, the Babylonians, and countless other ancient civilizations of which we could speak, they are not as enlightened as we. We are not a people that practice sacrifice as a part of our daily life. Certainly our religion does not require sacrifices from us. We have one sacrifice, which we remember Sunday after Sunday, and that ended, so we say, all need for additional sacrifice.

However we still require and practice sacrifice. Sacrifice is a most frequently used term over the radio, the TV, the newspapers, the magazines. On billboards, store fronts, we see the word sacrifice. Everything must go, we are sacrificing everything. Mama runs to the sale and papa does too. They do not mean they are offering the merchandise to a god. No, you are the god. They hope to trick you into giving them some money for their sacrifice. Or you hear a commentator say, "What a sacrifice," when he announces that two runners advanced on a bunt in a baseball game. I am certain that I heard Ronald Reagan use the word sacrifice when he was describing baseball games over WHO Radio.

So you see, sacrifice means an act involving loss, so greater gain may be attained. A loss by one or a few so that the many may gain. One could say, it is the price that must be paid.

Now I would have you just dwell with me a little further in the area of our own practice of sacrifice, beyond the facetious. We have many modern gods. And we make sacrifices to them, more than we believe. We make sacrifices of

human beings. There are probably more human beings sacrificed today than ever in the history of all the civilizations put together, up until the modern age.

For instance, if we should elect Castor and Pollux those twin stars in the heavens riding their chariot, as the gods of transportation then on the concrete alter stretching across this nation, we sacrifice to these Gods 50-60,000 lives a year and maim hundreds of thousands the same year, in order that millions may travel at a reckless speed. High up above the mountains we offer flights of passengers dashing into the ground in blood and fire, so that millions may go faster than the speed of sound. So also do we now, as we attempt to penetrate space, offer human sacrifices.

To the god, Baal, the god of fertility, or Ceres, the god of agriculture we offer cancer victims through chemicals, torn bodies by agricultural machinery, burn and buried bodies in dust explosions in grain elevators. Millions of people, victims of early death, dedicate themselves to the god of smoking and chewing. Scores of people offering themselves in such fashion that they take with them life after life through accidents, poor performance, fighting, brawling, spousal and child abuse as they dedicate themselves to Bacchus the god of wine and alcoholic drink.

Morpheus, the god of drugs, who's very popular right now, has many alters and many millions of devotees. Mercurius, the god of profit, under whom we commit all sorts of financial acts, including the seizing and plundering of companies, sacrificing the laborers whose factories have been closed. The god of war or Mars under whom terrorists in their jihad commit acts destroying some in order to call attention to the plight of the many. We launch awesome actions to depose a dictator and bring democracy with much collateral damage. We launch seasons of warfare sacrificing millions of lives for the sake of freedom for other millions. We now have the ability to make the ultimate sacrifice to offer up all creation in one great ball of fire, so that no sacrifices will ever need to be made again.

These are but a few of the gods to which we sacrifice. We are a sacrificial culture, even more than those of the past. We put up with these losses for the sake, we feel, of greater gain, as long as we are not the ones being sacrificed.

But you know, Paul called us to a different form of sacrifice. He said, present your bodies to God as a living sacrifice. He said, once you've accepted Jesus as your sacrifice and as your Lord and Master, you have within yourself the spirit of God and, thus, you are even better able than before, to make a living sacrifice. What you can do is more than humanitarianism, more than reforms, more than being good or doing good. What you have in you is God-like power to take that power of God through the renewal of your mind and actually transform life around you.

He said to us, what you have within you is a unifying force, which will complement each the other, in a joint and more powerful living sacrifice. Paul said, living life to the fullest is sacrifice, is a living sacrifice. Jesus put it, "lose yourself in order to find yourself." This kind of life does not allow a person to be a loner, but a "belonger." One who works in the community of the saved, so that the group sacrifice is even more efficacious. That is the real role of the Church. The standards of this world, with their insidious permeation into our total lifestyle, according to Paul, must be resisted. We have the power to resist and it is best resisted, not by negative reactions to what is evil, but primarily by positive involvement in the living sacrifice, to which Paul calls us.

It's the same principle when you have pressures outside you and you try to stop the leaks. One way to do it is to build up positive pressure within and that'll keep the pressures outside from crushing you. We find that out, as we go into deep sea diving. So it is in life. If we live positively, think openly and optimistically about the human potential, with the power of God, strive to help others realize their potential. In so doing we realize it ourselves. We change the climate and we make for a better situation for all.

So it is that we are called upon to move away from this world of human sacrifice to the world of living sacrifice. But more specifically, how does one make a living sacrifice? Now I come close to home. One of the ways is to teach Sunday School. How often we hear someone when they're asked say that I just don't have the ability, I just can't do that, and then all of a sudden discover they can. Now I wonder if even the Holy Spirit was in on that conversation. Isn't that marvelous? What a friend, who has been there all along aiding in your living sacrifice.

The point I'm making, in Sunday School, if you really believe that God's power is in you, you can do it. For God will give you the strength to understand and you can learn from others, who also are making living sacrifices. So when someone calls upon you to teach, or to take a duty of leadership in the church, this is a living sacrifice. A part of the corporate living sacrifice of the congregation.

The same way in the public domain. We need good people to offer themselves for public office. One of the dilemmas is that people with lower motives go into the vacuums, when there are not good people seeking public office. A good public servant knows what it is to be a living sacrifice. A "Living Sacrifice" cannot be bought. With all of evil going on in the political scene today I believe the devil is alive and active today. We need to offer ourselves for public office. And I think some of you know that I can look in the mirror with a certain amount of pride, although my offering was relatively small. And

I say to you, Christians should be out there in the hustings, offering themselves in public leadership.

We need to hold for ethics in our businesses, particularly in human relations. How often we change our stripes. We leave the church and go into other businesses and relate to people in ways that we would not relate to each other in the church, although I'm not so sure. I've seen some of the ways of the world being brought into the church. Persons not acting as living sacrifices.

We need also to realize that the Christian home is the place we practice living sacrifice. This calls upon us to bear up with strength, in spite of disappointments and to turn our cheek so that we might win the day and bring up our children in the ways of God.

Living sacrifice is a person of love and loving disposition, who seeks long-term solutions, not quick fixes. Who is slow to wrath. Living sacrifice is a life of love of God and of neighbor. We must ask ourselves, as those who say we want to follow Paul's admonition, what can I do to minimize my participation in the dominant role of human sacrifice today? How can I recognize that my presence, actually in church, is a ritual act rededicating myself to being a living sacrifice to God?

He calls upon us never to flag in zeal. To be a channel for the Holy Spirit and to take thought for what is noble in the sight of all.

Fear of Contagion
Covenant Christian Church
March 22, 1987
Scripture Acts 26:19-29

The subject I've chosen to speak on this morning is Fear of Contagion. I know it doesn't tell you very much, but as we get along, maybe you will find it out.

Among those of you who are engaged in selling, or have been, are women, particularly married women. Because the art of salesmanship is their natural art, with which I think they are born in order to survive, practiced to get a word in with and convince their husband to go along the way he doesn't want to go.

But salesmanship is an art engaged in by vast forces of those who are gainfully employed. In the past, I can remember door-to-door salesmen, much more than I remember so today.

The door-to-door salesman would come in, and he was taught the art of getting his foot in the door. Literally I've seen that followed. The foot in the door to keep the person of the house, whoever came to the door, from closing it in their face, so that a few more words could be gotten in, finally to get inside the house. If one got inside and was demonstrating or selling a vacuum sweeper, one of the first things he did before he would do anything else was to spread some white powder across the carpet.

There he was, with a mess, and then he says, I have for you a machine which will take this all up. The dear person was in a dilemma. So the machine was properly assembled, and hooked into their electricity, or even before that, it was pushed by manual power over the powder. The sales person was just enough of an imp to leave a portion of the powder there, so that subconsciously one would say to themselves, well, I almost have to have that machine to finish that job up.

If the sales person was really devilish, he'd run a considerable area on your rug and then proceed to empty the receptacle right in the midst of your carpet, to show you all the dirt that he had gotten up out of your carpet. You didn't know that he'd filled it two-thirds full before he came in.

There you were, such a dirty rug, he's only gone over a portion of it and got all that out and you were bound and determined you had to have this wonderful machine to get the dirt that's obviously in your carpet, fully out.

Of course, if he really wanted to get to you, and particularly your husband, if he'd call at the time when the man of the house was there, from somewhere he'd produce an instrument, which had a handle and a wire frame. He'd say to the husband, which do you want? This or this? This you have to do, because every spring your wife gets you out and makes you beat the rug. For this is what your wife can do and you don't have to beat the rug.

So the salesman, door-to-door, only, of course, the typical macho man would say, I don't beat the rugs, she does. The door-to-door salesman who came to us, carried to us, important information about new-fangled ideas and new technology. It's not happening so much anymore. Instead, we have mass media merchandising and vast advertising through all the media, to prepare us and soften us for the purposes of being sold.

All through the media and advertising, we see special kinds of gimmicks, which will do for you what other things have not done for you. They're always enticingly advertised. You notice, they do not say, \$10 or \$20. What do they say, \$9.95 or \$19.95. Always those few cents and maybe even .99 one cent under the dollar. So you see the smaller number first. That's the same trick as

dumping stuff on your carpet. To produce in you the sense that you're really making a saving.

Today's advertising does things to us, doesn't it? It builds up a sense of need and that need can be related to hunger. I find it much more effective for all sorts of food to be spread before me in advertising, before I've eaten my meal. If we happen to be watching television at or about meal time, I can tell you that food advertising seems, somehow, to appeal to me far more before I have eaten than after I'm sated and full. I have wondered why advertisers hadn't caught on and food people say, we don't want any advertising from say 12:15 to 1:30, related to our product. We'd rather have it, say from 3 to 5:30. But nevertheless, there is this attempt to build up hunger for food, then push a particular food to satisfy you.

Advertising builds up a need for satisfying one's status. First of all, one's status is attacked and one is made to feel insecure. Then the product that will improve one's status, is offered. Do your armpits stink? Then take this to improve your status. But generally speaking, I guess they don't say, do your armpits stink. Why don't they? Why don't they come right out and say what they mean? They used to have it much more specific. There was one phrase, B-O, remember that? It was far more effective than some of the more genteel ways with which they approach some of those conditions.

What they do is to produce in one a sense of deficiency and then offer that which will correct that deficiency. They do that sort of advertising, which enables one, by buying and using certain products, which will buffer us against fears and insecurities, as well as palliate pain and illness. So the process of advertising, getting the foot on the floor, dumping the dirt on the rug, is accomplished now, very effectively, through mass media. If you don't think those little blips of advertising, \$9.95 or \$6.95 for somebody's recording, don't produce, you should study the marketing analyses, because they produce hundreds of thousands of replies and millions in profits.

The thing that interests me, incidentally, about all the advertising is that most of the people who do the advocacy, that is, particularly those who've been blessed by this product or medicine, are so beautiful and so symmetrical. They never use an ugly man like me to show what can happen if you take certain foods and medicines and that sort of thing. I'd like to see them advertise something that would shrink this nose. But I want to tell you, I'm not ashamed of it, it's a good nose. The only trouble it gets me in other peoples' business, sometimes too often. It's probably the reason I was led into the ministry, I wanted to get into other peoples' business.

Well, salesmanship is very important in our life. I do not want to denigrate it. It's very important to open our vision to see other ways of doing things. It's very important in developing a mentality of resistance in choosing, for if you're going to survive in this day and age you don't dare buy everything that's offered to you. You've got to learn to choose or you're going to run afoul. Unfortunately, too many of us do run afoul, judging from the bankruptcy rates that are going up. Many of the personal bankruptcies are related to the use of the credit card. It's so easy to get credit to respond to salesmanship.

My friends, salesmanship is also very important in the spiritual side of life. It's in this area that I feel that you and I fail the most. We can go out and work very hard to sell a product for the commission or the return it will bring us, in order to give us economic security. When it comes to something as vital as our faith, we seem, somehow, to neglect to sell it. Christianity, the Christian way, needs to be sold. And it needs to be sold door-to-door and person-to-person. Only occasionally can one be in a situation when one might participate, significantly and dynamically in mass conversion.

Christianity, in order to be sold, must be demonstrated. That salesman that does not know his product, who fumbles in the assembly of his machine, who cannot answer the technical questions, does not sell very well.

That person who says, well, this machine is probably as good as any other machine, would you like to have one, won't sell it. He has to sell it as the best. If we do not believe that our Christian faith is the best for us and for others, we will not sell it. A congregation grows only if it, member by member, propagates.

What shall be the style of our evangelism? Now there is a point of view among many Christians, that the condition of man is so despicable, he is so depraved, that he cannot do anything which will affect his salvation and, therefore, all he can do is wait for God and hope and pray that God has elected him for salvation. Such an attitude does not result, very frankly, in propagation of the faith. Unless one, ironically, twists it around and preaches in such fashion that one becomes so anxious about their condition that they, in turn, agonize and pray, until they psych themselves into a condition of believing they are elect for salvation.

Another way is to come into the fold of the church, where a priesthood will administer special sacraments, which by these works will guarantee you freedom from damnation. To me, this is very close to the ancient fear of man of demonic forces which they did not understand, and to which they offered sacrifices.

To me, Christianity is not, in the ancient sense, a sacrificial religion. To me, Jesus came here and died, not to satisfy a vengeful God for our sins, but he came and died for a way of life, which would elevate people in this life and for eternity.

So I'm not interested in selling a religion, which scares the hell, literally, out of people. Rather, I'm interested in a religion which is like a contagion. Now, in contagions, you have to get close to people to give it to them. To give them the infection. Actually it means coming together to touch. I'm interested in a touching religion. I'm interested in a Christianity which is in one's life and so overflowing that one reaches out and touches other people and gives them the contagion.

We need to come close enough to one another so that people can see the quality of our lives and want to share in it. It's very interesting, if one is courting another person for the sake of marriage, we don't stand off in some far distant land and wish. We want to get as close as possible and the closer the better. At least we want to develop a touching acquaintance.

Why is then in our religion we want to become so remote, so neutral. We don't want to share what we have. I prefer the living example being brought close to others.

What is it that hinders our witnessing or evangelism as a congregation? One of the main hindrances is an assumption that's quite prevalent, and that is that religion is basically a private affair. Our doctrine of separation of church and state, as it has come to be practiced, has contributed to this. Life out there, which is the state, we say, is not the place for religion. Religion is something which is internal and private. And it doesn't make any difference what one's religion is, that's freedom to have the religion, and it's private. And you don't bother other people with it.

Our Constitution, and this is the year of observance of our Constitution, does not teach separation of life and religion. Only an institutional church, as an official Church of the state. I want to insist that we need to insist on separation of a church, as institution, dominating the state. Increasingly, we're beginning to see efforts of church groups as institutions, attempting, as the church, to tell the state what to legislate. The more proper thing would be for church people, Christians, as citizens, to legislate what is proper and rational. When we legislate at the church's bidding, first thing you know we'll be legislating doctrine and that is a dangerous thing.

The Constitution does not say that we, as religiously practicing people, should not practice our religion in life, fully and completely or should not, in all phases of life, propagate it. Now it is true that in certain functions, we must be careful about overtly propagating doctrines of faith. A school teacher espousing her

doctrines, for instance, in the school system, but there's nothing to keep that school teacher from living such a quality of life that it affects her teaching and he or she stands out as exemplary. For a Christian should be the best in any vocation they choose, not mediocre. The best of their capability.

So religion and life are intertwined and we must be careful lest privatizing religion would destroy religion itself. Evangelism is hindered also, because many of us think that religion has to do with my own salvation. In essence we're saying, let others go to hell. If they don't want to take enough initiative to do something about it, that's their business. But I must be so holy and follow all the processes of religion so that I can guarantee that I will not be tarnished or blemished and I can be separated out from the world and retreat away from it and be saved.

That kind of religious expression may have its values in certain monastic and other kinds of separations from the world, but does little to propagate the faith. Every religious order that stayed out among the people and become missionary was the kind of religious order that propagated the faith, whether it was the ancient monastic orders, such as the Dominicans, the Franciscans, the Jesuits of the Catholic faith or all the various missionary movements of Protestantism. Those kinds of religious movements, which, in a sense, not only dedicated one's whole life to holiness, but also dedicated it for the purpose of propagating the faith, were efficacious.

So the propagation of Christianity has been handicapped by preoccupation with one's own individual salvation and, as I've intimated, it is also handicapped, because some of us become so preoccupied by life after death, that we neglect the present one. When a person can think and preach and teach only about those aspects of life after death, and neglects those aspects of day-by-day life, they do not come to, and appeal to people, where they are. True evangelism begins where people are.

Propagation of the faith is also hindered by a certain self-righteousness. The idea is come and join me, because I've had a special spiritual rebirth or discovery of the perfect way. I am a special person.

Now, initially, certain groups do gather into this kind of uniqueness, but they do not spread very far, because a kind of exclusiveness begins to draw a boundary around the experience of rebirth. Such has handicapped various charismatic movements, as they developed their own unique spirituality. Unless they broke loose and went out and testified and lived, they did not grow. The early Pentecostal movement in the early part of the 19th century, did break out, and you have now all sorts of Pentecostal type churches, which spread with fervor. The neo-charismatic movement has not broken out,

because it became an almost elitist movement. These are handicaps to evangelism.

Evangelism, in its best sense, is witnessing in the normative way of life for the converted. The converted person goes back into their life. Now it is true, they may make some judgments about what their vocation is and remove themselves from those kinds of vocations, which dwell parasitically on the bad appetites of human beings. I frankly feel that a bartender or a person who deals with the distribution of that drug, alcohol, or any other habituating types of human uses, needs to examine very carefully in the mirror of their spiritual decision, their employment.

But normally, and wherever we go, we witness. Witness in terms of the quality of our life, a quality which has been enhanced by our very conversion. To be converted in John the Baptist language, means to repent and be baptized and this means, literally, to change one's attitude toward life. Not to remove one's self from life. To be converted means to turn and to be changed and it means literally not only to turn and be changed, but to become an advocate of a new way of life.

If one does not exhibit, demonstrate or view this new way of life in such fashion that others may see one's good works and glorify God, then one is as a barren tree with no fruits. How many of us could stand the scrutiny of a celestial gardener or would we be cut down and cast into the fire? Being Christian does not mean just being good and keeping out of mischief. It means an aggressive lifestyle of telling, by word, by example, the love of God, what it means to you and what it can mean to another. If we don't bear fruit, as Christians, we forget our mission, and we live as others in the world. If we have not spoken of Jesus Christ, then we are not practicing Christianity.

It is not enough to come to church, faithfully, weekly and even through the week, unless all through our lives we are constantly speaking to others about Christ. Confession does not stop with conversion. It goes on to profession. Otherwise, what one practices.

We need to be involved in Christian salesmanship. When one goes hunting and sees a flock of birds, you just don't haul up and shoot at the flock, or else you don't do very well. You may be fortunate and lucky to hit a bird, or you may injure several and get nothing down. You pick out one bird in that flock and you aim at it.

You heard of the person who was desperately hungry and went hunting and had one bullet. Here was a V-shaped flock of geese flying toward him. He aimed at that head goose, with a prayer on his lips. He hit that head goose

straight on the bill. It split the bullet and went down each side and he got the whole flock.

Have you heard of another hunter, who was very hungry and had his family to feed and he had one bullet. He saw three birds on a branch. And he didn't know what to do. He knew that one bird was not enough for that family. So he shot at that branch and he split it and it opened up and clamped down on all three birds' feet.

Well, now we're not going to be as lucky as that in Christian salesmanship. I want to suggest to you some very practical things. First of all, analyze your neighborhood. Look over and scrutinize your place of work. Pick out one or two persons and/or families. Concentrate on them. Include them in your prayers. Invite them to your home and get to know them. Invite them to worship, to an event in your church. Pick them up and accompany them, bring them, if necessary. Repeat that again and again and again.

My friends, that's the only way to do it. Person to person, door to door. You can't just say, evangelize. It's a very, very, very practical thing. You've got to pick on someone and stay with them and work at it, day by day. A salesman, if he can make one good contact out of 10, he feels very lucky. And if he makes one good sale out of 100, he probably winds up wealthy.

We need to begin one by one and I want to tell you that Christian salesmanship turns in better odds than that. But it requires forthrightness and focusing on our part. One never knows, also, whose prayer one is answering. You remember, Phillip was just going along his way and there was a fellow that had a problem in a chariot and reading the scripture and pondering. Phillip was the answer to his prayer.

If you do not demonstrate your faith day by day at your workplace and wherever you are, you may be letting down some person in need. How often I've seen this and I do not say this with ego. I would be traveling and someone would choose, particularly on the train where you could choose your own seat, or the bus, he'd be going up and down and looking over and choose to sit by me. Time after time, they would say, you look like a person I can talk to.

Now if that was the case, it's only because the good Lord has given to me a kind of condition, which makes me non-threatening yet, responsive to peoples' needs and that's what we need to be - to be such a person to which others will not be afraid to come. We must not be afraid to be the one to which others will say, go talk to that person, who can help you.

Being that kind of person opens the door of another person's life to Christ. You must get close to another. Close enough to touch and to give them contagion, the disease, if you will, of Christianity. The message, in essence, is still that of John the Baptist, repent and be baptized and save yourself from this crooked generation. John was speaking of his generation and I'm sure if he were alive today, he'd see that our generation comes up to his and far more.

I've never seen a more crooked generation than the one I'm in. In fact, it seems that it's more degenerate than my father and mother's generation. If we had time, I could elucidate. So we must do our witnessing and evangelism by the contagion of personality, resulting from a redeemed response to the life of Jesus Christ in us.

If one is saved, then one's lifestyle, attitude, must be such that others will even ask, where are you coming from? One must be so full, so brimming over with happiness and joy and peace, that peace that passes understanding, that peace that comes to us in the midst of the greatest of worries, the peace that others will want to have and you will want to share. It seems we want to share the new diet, the new medicine, the car, the appliance, the new fishing way or lure. Why not share one's faith?

In these weeks before Easter, my friends, I challenge each of us to pledge to bring someone to Christ and to his Church.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote, "And now there is witness to the things we always hold that we will lose some day. The only things we ever keep are what we give away."

My friends, unless you give your religion away, you will not keep it. You will not keep it. For the true test of Christians is whether they are contagious. Whether they can touch others. Whether they will touch others and give to them Christianity.

SINNING SAINTS

Altoona Christian Church

August 28, 1994 Sunday 10:15 A.M.

Scripture Matthew 9:1-13

I. Introduction: I hope that you as members of this church even more than Mrs. McCaw and I as well as our grandchildren have pleasant memories of the experience last Sunday in the opening of the copper box from the old corner stone. How wonderful it is to have in your midst persons who have respect for tradition and work to preserve the history of the church. We were also impressed by what followed. My! you folks do eat well!. Our thanks for including us within your family.

A. In the topic of the sermon are to be found two words which normally contrast with each other, sinner and saint. Perhaps some understanding of their meaning is in order. In Sunday School a young boy was asked, "What must we do to be forgiven of our sins?" He replied, "Well, I suppose first we gotta sin." That answer doesn't tell us much about sin.

Calvin Coolidge, a man of few words, awoke on Sunday morning to find that his wife was ill. Nevertheless she insisted that he not stay home with her but go alone to church. When he got back he inquired of his wife's health but she asked him, "Did you enjoy the service." He replied, "Yes." She then asked what the minister preached on. Coolidge replied, "Sin." What did he say?" asked his wife. Coolidge replied, "agin it." Which still doesn't tell us about sin.

One Sunday after the service at which I had preached I was standing at the church door shaking hands when a dear lady took a hold of my hand and looked at me with an undeserved reverence and said, "You must be a saint to live with." As my wife and I were driving home after the service she began chuckling and I asked, "What's so funny." She had been standing by me at the church door and had overheard the lady's remark. She said that she was laughing at what she almost said to the lady which was, "Living with him one finds that there is a very narrow line between the saint and the sinner. Thank goodness for a wife. She keeps one humble.

B. Sin is generally defined in reference to God. If the summary of all law is found in the statement of Jesus that one should love God with all their being and also their neighbor as themselves than Sin is any behavior which adversely affects a proper relationship to God or with ones neighbor. Sin is also any behavior which diminishes ones ability to love God or one's neighbor. If one does not have respect for oneself and does not keep ones physical, mental and spiritual health in the best of shape than one is sinning because one diminishes ones ability to love God and ones neighbor. It is not just

negative behavior but also lack of any behavior, or sins of omission which can hurt a loving relationship. Some people think that sins of omission are those we should have committed but didn't. So sin is behavior or lack of it which affects our ability to love God and neighbor.

II. The word, saint, has to do with the Latin word, sanctus or holy. A saint then is one whose life reflects living close to God and doing his will, in essence really practicing love of God and neighbor. The dedication of early Christians to their cause in spite of all difficulties even death caused them to be called saints. So Paul would address the Christians in various places as Saints in Christ Jesus. Later posthumously Sainthood as a special title was conferred by the Church. Later Christians felt that such persons had special intercessory powers with God and could if beseeched through prayer speak to God on their behalf.

A. I would like to divert for a moment and speak of the process of sanctifying or making saints in America. It is the media which focuses on individuals and makes them if not saints heroes or at least notorious. It is our way of sanctifying and developing so called role models. Individuals even find some success in hiring press agents to build up their public image so that they may be regarded in a superior light and maybe find their picture on a cereal box, or a billboard or in a magazine advertising various products or life styles. We tend to sanctify persons involved in sports, in entertainment and politics. With the picture media the constant exposure gives a certain sanctity to commentators. We even have publications called Who's Who.

B. When these persons we lift up into the limelight fall from grace we become appalled, shocked, dismayed and angry that they should let us down like that. We tie politicians to polls and whip them with public opinion surveys. Somehow when one becomes lifted up above the rabble, where you and I live, one becomes public property and no longer has the right to willy nilly go their own way without offending the public. Many persons find such exposure too much for them and they become disillusioned with the loss of their really unreal self and commit suicide, die of alcoholism, lung cancer or social diseases. Some think of themselves as kings above the law and commit unspeakable crimes. It takes a strong person to withstand the pressures of notoriety and maintain a truly saintly behavior in this life. Perhaps a person on the path to saintly behavior is one who recognizes that in this life the most they can be is a sinning saint.

C. It is probably a fact that saints have clay feet. That is they are not perfect. Every culture has its heroes or its saints and it as strong as the persons they have set aside prove to be. However no matter how hard we strive as human beings very rarely do we find individuals who are perfect in all ways. In fact to

be exceptional seems to furnish the basis for excusing divergent behavior. Two of our most beloved presidents, Franklin Roosevelt and Dwight Eisenhower had relationships with ladies other than their own wives. Yet a society cannot excuse for long deviant behavior on the part of set aside or elevated persons- their saints- because of improper example. Witness our concern about the use of drugs by our sports figures . It interesting that when life style affects performance and performance effects economics we seem to be more upset than by the question of morality.

III. Yet Jesus picked on and criticized the "saints" of his day. He felt that the hypocritical saints were among the righteous or the keepers of the religious law.

A. Jews under the law thought they were holy or saints when they kept the law of Kosher, laws of cleanliness and performed the sacrifices of purification and penitence. Jesus felt that the righteous even at times hid behind the law to sin. He defied much of the religious legalism of his day. Paul went even further and said that the law condemned, that is it did not free one from sin or make one holy.

It is interesting that Jesus chose as his associates sinners in the eyes of the religious righteous. He was reprimanded for fellowshiping with tax collectors and women of the street. Jesus recognized the saintly potential in such persons when God touched their lives. He could recognize the potential for good - the saintliness of the sinner.

B. Saints are not made either by the public through the media or by ones own efforts to be right and keep all the rules or by papal consistory. Sainthood is a gift of God on all who accept his lordship, who confess Jesus as Savior and give themselves in service to God and neighbor. The media is fickle. It can make and it can destroy. God is not fickle. He loves and stays with his saints and gives them strength to persevere.

Christians are saints by virtue of being in Christ Jesus. The Christian calling is as a consecrated person chosen by God. Saint is a term to be worn by church members. We all should address each other as Saint Bob. or Mary. or Bill or Martha. We are set apart for God's service,- faithful ones, holy ones. chosen ones, elevated ones. It is an awesome and even frightening thing to be chosen by God to serve Him.

IV. The Christian made holy, or set aside, becomes a saint by accepting God's initiative on his behalf.

A. However, the Christian remains in the flesh and in the world. This reality makes him a sinning saint more often than he cares to acknowledge. One is constantly in danger of being compromised by worldly involvement.

B. Some Christians through the ages have tried to withdraw from the world into monastic movements, by the practice of celibacy, joining communes such as the Shakers, the Amish, even the Mormons. The Puritans in Massachusetts considered themselves a set apart society. Many have attempted to create the perfect society where only the righteous prevail.

C. How to be in the world but not of it is the challenge. When I was a child gambling was a sin, use of alcoholic beverages was a sin, use of tobacco was a sin, looking at "dirty" pictures was a sin, going to movie theaters and dance halls was a sin, going hunting or fishing, going to athletic events or conducting business on Sunday was a sin. Using credit to go in debt, going to loan sharks, going bankrupt and not paying one's debts was a sin. Today our government and our business world sponsors all of the above. Yesterday may have been easier for a Christian. Today it is harder for a Christian to be distinguished from the average citizen. In fact church members seem to be the average citizens. It is so hard today to be a sinning saint and not just become an all out sinner. It is hard to be in the world and not of it.

Alexander Pope (early eighteenth century English poet) once wrote: "Sin is a monster of such frightful mien, As to be hated needs but to be seen, But seen too oft, familiar with her face, We first endure, then pity, then embrace."

V. Sin is the natural human condition borne of the "me first" instinct and the desire to satisfy personal cravings. To hold our selfishness in check requires conscious effort with superhuman assistance. Society and culture provide some reservoir of human experience which if renewed and followed can give some assistance but when forgotten or not passed on in the family leaves a person morally naked and unable to discern right from wrong.

A. Failure to accept the fact of the basic human condition can lead to the downfall of not only persons but of whole communities and even nations. Sin involves an act of perverted freedom. We are free- free to sin- yet we can't seem to escape the consequences of sin. Our very freedom is an awesome responsibility. God had hoped that we would choose the good over the bad. The human race in the past has not chosen the good over the bad and we still do not. Yet God has not given up on us. He intervenes and said and still says, "Lean on me and I will help you."

B. It is important for the Christian to recognize the need to be constantly alert and not expect too much from their own capacity to go it alone or do it yourself. Christians need to remember the strength of God through the Holy Spirit to be obtained through prayer. They need to say with Paul, "There but

for the grace of God go I." They can also say, "There because of the grace of God I no longer go."

C. How to live consistently under Christ, to grow more toward sanctification -with more emphasis on the saint and less on the sinner- is the challenge for the Christian. The Apostles and particularly, Paul were urging members of the newly formed fellowship of Christ to follow Christ's teachings to be perfect even as your heavenly Father is perfect. Paul said that my power is made perfect in weakness by drawing near to God. John wrote that love casts out fear and James urges Christians to do good works, to grow toward completeness and perfection. There also was constant urging by the apostles for the brethren to sustain one another. Paul acknowledged the problem of being a saint when he wrote that those things I ought not to do I do and those things I should do I fail to do.

D. There are dangers on the road to saintly behavior. Some in striving to become perfect feel that they have arrived and can sin no more. They then draw the conclusion nothing that they do can be wrong. Whole movements have been developed on such zealous righteousness to the harm of those outside the movement as well as to those inside the movement. Many times such comes about because a leader plays God.

There is also a danger of procrastinating in deciding to change ones behavior making the excuse that I'll just slip back again to my old ways. But we have an understanding and loving Father God. He chides us not just for a slip but for disobedience, that is for deliberately and intentionally choosing against previous commitments. .

VI. After the acceptance of Jesus' Lordship and becoming new saints, made holy by the saving grace of God it is still difficult to meet the challenge to strive for perfection.

A. Christians on the road to perfection find that they have changed from being sinners to being "sinning saints" who must constantly work to be worthy of their salvation and to be called "saints in Jesus Christ." They do not want to go on sinning so that God's grace will abound. Yet the purist saint seems never free from the potential to sin. Everyday the Christians pray "forgive our sins as we forgive the sins of those who sin against us. Actually even the grossest sinner is in debt to Christ for the gift of God's grace which is also on their behalf and which gives them the power to overcome.

B. From whence comes the strength to persevere in seeking perfection, to pick ourselves off the floor and start again? It comes in realizing that we are not alone. The Holy Spirit of God our Father is with us constantly. We also have the sustaining fellowship of our fellow seekers in the congregation - in

this place the members of the Altoona Christian Church. We must learn to accept forgiveness. Some want to punish themselves by feeling guilty or they want to walk on the weak side in order to cause others to sympathize with them rather than standing free and strong again and becoming a source of strength for others as they also will have needs. One must remain humble, seeing oneself in the mirror of life as we really are, that is constantly subject to temptation. We must put on the whole armor of God and keep it in good condition, as well as maintaining a posture of thankfulness in the knowledge that God loves us, and will always answer our call for help even at times when we fail to ask for it.

Remember at the conclusion of the Scripture read this morning Jesus said, "I came not to call the righteous but the sinners." Even as Sinning Saints we must always acknowledge the priority of Jesus' call to us and accept his gift of salvation.

Mind Renewal
Covenant Christian Church
August 25, 1987

Scripture: Romans: 12:1-8

We have just returned from England where we spent a lovely Christmas period enjoying the grandson and his parents, leaving there just in time to miss their winter which came so unusually and abundantly to them as you have been reading. Our daughter, having called us and telling us that they had 18 inches of snow, which is somewhat more than we have in one snow in Iowa. We returned missing the winter in England, but I returned in time to attend the ladies' Bible study (although I understand it isn't just ladies – men are also welcome), and also evidently to catch a cold, so I'm blaming somebody who attended there, though I know that it takes about two weeks' incubation for this sort of thing, so it must have come from England. In any event, I'm worried that if I sneeze into this thing, it might just spray it through the loudspeakers all over – so you duck if you see me sneezing. It's wonderful what electronics can do – they can just amplify this cold all over and make you share and participate. Although in listening to people coming in – the children coughing, sneezing and several of them in here, I'm sure we can have contests of who has the lower voice. Many of us seem to be afflicted, and I'm told that it lasts – one dear brother – I think he was trying to cheer me up – said he had been fighting this for two months.

I should also mention to you that my wife who was afflicted with a very severe cough a little over a year ago in China was given a little pill. It was called, as I recall, the "Fisherman's Friend." It's used by the fishermen in the cold, North seas on and around Iceland. I put one in my mouth just a short while ago, and now I know its efficacy. It tastes so horrible and really burns your nostrils, so when it's finally dissolved and gone away you feel so much better.

I want to commend you on the good work and activity which you have carried on during my absence. It's my desire that in the periods when we are not together, however long or short it may be, that we not just mark time. Let this be a period when we become even more increasingly a witnessing and ministering congregation during this period of searching for new leadership.

How many of you have heard of the word "wit" – W-I-T? I think most any parent has told their young now as they go out into the world, "Now, keep your wits about you!" "Wit" having to do with the ability of a person to use their eyes and their ears and their experience of the past to make proper judgments and not be taken as a fool. This story is told of a college president who had had a particularly difficult day, and late in the day there came this urgent phone call from the program chairman of a service club – I won't say whether it was the Lions or the Rotary or Kiwanis – one of those clubs – saying to him, "We've had a cancellation, and I'm in a bind. Could you send us someone from the college to come and be our program tomorrow? We'd like someone who is a good speaker and a wit. And the president said, "Oh, my goodness! So he finally replied, I'll send the vice-president and the dean, and together they'll make a wit, by inferring that it is possible to be half-wits, and that brings me to the subject matter at hand.

Have you ever thought about your mind? What it is? Where it comes from? Or is it something you just take for granted? How many of you made New Year's Resolutions? Let's see... You hesitate, you don't want to admit you're already hypocrites. Was that something we went into because it was the thing to do, or did we really set our MIND in a way that we might be able to really carry through with that resolution? Do you realize there are over 200 references to the mind in the Bible according to the Nelson's Comprehensive Concordance of the RSV – the Revised Standard Version provided. The word, mind, goes through many languages, yet very similar in Anglo-Saxon, Middle English or going back to Latin where it's mens and minos in Greek, monos in Sanskrit, it seems to carry the same connotation. Now at the risk of being considered sexist, actually, the word "man" is the same as "mind". Have you thought about your mind? Do you ever think about your mind? It sounds like it would be a reflective, introspective experience – to use your mind to think about itself. Is it something that you can kind of lay out here and contemplate? You do want to be careful, if you get it out in your hands and look at it, you might drop it, then all of a sudden lose context then, and you'd lose your mind, you couldn't find it.

I've had people who wanted to be very generous with their minds particularly when I was younger and occasionally yet, I've had people say to me. "I have half a notion to give you a piece of my mind." I thought that was most generous until it came to my mind what they had in their mind. Sometimes they wouldn't have a half a notion, sometimes they'd say I have a notion, and could almost be sure I was going to get it. However, if someone got too insistent, I tended to reply – now, I don't urge you to do this or advocate – but this shows you my smallness. "With the small mind you have, a piece wouldn't be very much." Or I would say, "I wouldn't do that. You wouldn't have much left."

The mind does figure in life more than we realize. One of the words in Tagalog, my first language from the Philippine Islands, was "Hindibali" – "Never mind." And quite often I'd ask a question, "Hindabali" – "Never mind." Don't think about it, forget about it. It's not something you should know. We're going to the place you're probably not going to go." I've also heard quite frequently the term, "Mind your P's & Q's." Well, I've never quite figured out what my P's & my Q's were. I was afraid to, for fear that it might be something naughty. How often the ultimatum came to me, "my mind is made up." And I wondered if the mind was some sort of bed to be made up. "Have you lost your marbles?" Vernacular: "Have you lost your mind?" Or someone would say to me, "Will you give me your mind?" Another way of requesting one's attention.

I heard it said, "Give me a child until his mind is full, and he will not depart from the teaching he has received." Hitler laid claim to the minds of the German youth. And even felt that if a lie could be repeated enough, it would change the minds of adults. The character or condition of a person is described by such terms as "high" or "low" minded, feeble-minded, sober-minded, half-minded, double-minded. There is a word called "half-baked" – which infers that the dough has not quite dried up and the person is soggy-minded. The mind, then, does not seem to be a biological entity like the brain but the result of a biological entity, a person being stimulated particularly by sight and sound to thus accumulate from individual stimuli or experiences an understanding or composite appreciation of relationships between the experiences and what they tell him about other persons and other aspects of the society and environment in which he lives. From this composite comes the basis for volition or the expression of will or the power to choose or will power. Seneca, a Latin philosopher and statesman said, "The more the mind receives, the more it expands." But maybe if Seneca lived today, he would question with how much the mind can cope. The overabundance of stimuli today which includes not only programmed insights and sounds tugging at us for our loyalty, our purchasing power, our votes, but also waft us away into entertainment land – away from caring for important duties as do also in this

day mind-altering chemicals which not only destroy one's mind but ultimately one's life. There's a terrible competition for our attention.

There's also a great preoccupation with trivia – even games named after it – even our vaunted educational system is under severe criticism. Not just because skills are lacking in many of our youth which will enable them to cope with modern day living but mind development – mind character – will character - is in disarray. Good choices seem difficult, and the sense of responsible choices seems to escape. Time and mind go together. One can extrapolate an individual's personality or their character by their mind-budget or diet, and over a period of time can determine what has gone into the making of their mind. Many of us are suffering from malnutrition of the mind. Many more than are suffering from malnutrition of the body. There's a careless disregard for the development of one's mind, and that's much more threatening to one's self and one's fellows than insufficient diet for one's stomach.

We are said to be created in the image of God. To be so, is to have intelligence, a mind, and free will. This forms the basis for morality and the ability to choose between good and evil. In the third chapter of Ecclesiastes, it is written, "He, God, has put eternity into man's mind," and the Bible is full of the linkage to God in terms of the mind of the human being. Jesus, in one of his few references to the mind, admonished his disciples to "love God with their heart and soul and entire mind." Paul in the third chapter of Colossians wrote "set your mind on things that are above and not on things of the earth." He also wrote in 1st Corinthians in the 15th chapter "come to your right mind and sin no more." Paul thought so much of the mind and its rational process that he said - and I wish people would remember these words of Paul - "I would rather speak five words with my mind in order to instruct others than 10,000 words in a tongue." The author of the pastoral epistle 1st Peter admonished his readers to "gird up their minds, to get themselves in order, and be sober". This same author, also as Paul, urged them not to think more highly of themselves than they ought to think but to have a tender heart and a humble mind.

How can one renew one's mind? In the last of Luke, the last of Jesus' days, it is said that he opened up their minds as disciples to understand the scripture. We can do so much in the renewal of our mind, but we are not alone. Jesus will help us - help us renew our minds and make them instruments in the service of God. There are practical things we can do. This has to do not only with the first of the year but all parts of the year. We need to become self-conscious and take an inventory of what is entering our minds. What is preoccupying our attention? What are we eating? That is, what are we reading and seeing? What are we doing and hearing? Where do we spend our time? How do we spend our time? Is the Bible regularly a part of our study? Is

conversation with God - not just prayers of petition and listening for his voice to reply - a regular part of our practice? What programs on TV command our attention?

I was often tempted to set the VCR because I'm almost sure before I get home that the fishing program is going to start, and there's a whole bunch of programs right over the noon hour on Sunday, and in this time of year with the cold, and such diversion just makes you feel like "heaven?" So you can see the TV can come in and fill our minds. You know too much wrestling, football, basketball and fishing programs, if we just take it all in it just ruins our minds. Maybe a little bit for spice. I'm not saying cut it all out. I haven't quite got to that position with myself, but I'm saying, "folks, what we're doing to our minds is a crime."

Furthermore, do we give our bodies the proper care for the proper housing of our minds. Maybe we're too chemically dependent on a liquid or a pill or other form of intake. We have been admonished not to be conformed to this world but be transformed. Be able to be sensitive to the will of God and to be able to discern the good, the acceptable, and the perfect. We are to live in a complementary state, one with another. Not in a competitive or exploitative state. We are to serve as individuals and as a community in God's name. Each of us can renew and improve our mind by being more conscious of it. We do not have to be passive. We are in charge. No one who is beset with an overwhelming bad habit, a bad attitude, or a sense of sin can fail to renew one's mind - even fail to change one's whole personality - if they will but let Christ open the mind to its own potential - to let Christ open our minds to be truly his disciple in happy and satisfying service in his kingdom so as the hours go and the days past the afflictions of body and soul will seem minor in the victories and the euphoria that comes when one's hand is in the hand of Christ, and he leads us to his kingdom.

Let us pray. Oh God we feel you near, and we believe that your son leads us. Help us to follow. In his name we pray, Amen.

God Spelling
Covenant Christian Church
August 25, 1987

Scripture: Romans:1.1-17

It is good to see so many of you out this morning. I judged by the sneezing and snorting and the flash of white that there's still a good deal of bronchial and sinus involvement these days. For my own condition, I can report that I am 50% better – which means I'm looking forward to becoming 100% better. Well, even 60% would be probably the norm for me. I might report that Maxine has graciously consented to take her turn with the flu, and she was encouraged by me not to be with us this morning but remain in bed. I have doubts that she will do such. She is the type that when I get out of the door, gets up and scurries around. I commiserate with all the rest of you who have preceded me. I now feel more empathetic even if I'm more pathetic. Somehow this week of flu has made us honest, hasn't it? The cold weather has come in to remind us that this is wintertime. I'm sort of ambivalent, I feel that there should be 8-10 inches of snow at least with a few three foot drifts. A test of my macho to see if my snowblower will work and a few other things like that. I also as a horticulturist have some concern, without snow cover, severe weather is very hard on shrubbery and ground types like strawberries and other vines, and it's good to have, well a considerable depth of snow to keep the ground from getting so cold.

On the other hand, there is some compensatory advantage – a lot of creeping things find it very hard to subsist and continue to subsist in this kind of extreme situation. A lot of molds and other things get along quite famously when we don't have these hard freezes, so in some ways, our health should improve. One must think positively and think that way. I did meditate this week on how do you cure a cold – with a little bit of a fever, I concluded I had a cold plus the flu. Many times when I want to get rid of things, I give them away. I tried that with the flu, but it didn't seem to do any good. I tried to give the cold to my wife. I don't know who gave to me, probably my grandchildren when I came back from England, but in any event, giving a cold away doesn't help you any. Instead, it cripples you because here it is, I've got to go home now, and I've got to get lunch! So that just backfires, doesn't it? So trying to give a cold away or any kind of sickness is no way to get rid of it.

Well, I finally concluded that the only way to get rid of a cold or at least the awareness of it is to get something worse, and I thought about that – indeed, some things began to surface in the midst of it to distract me. Have you ever realized that an ingrown toenail can distract you from a cold? Or a toothache?

Yes, there are certain chronic things that if they get bad enough, other things that afflict you seem to be relatively less important. That's very interesting about the psychology of life and living. People can be weak and under certain great catastrophes can suddenly be strong, have strength to lift automobiles off of victims and that sort of thing. So many times we are suffering with ourselves and thinking about how awful we feel when we should look at ourselves and take an inventory to see how much potential is still there – and what we could really do. Now, I'm not saying to be unwise and jump out and run and scoop the snow without a coat and hat .

But many times we probably feel too sorry for ourselves and maybe that isn't necessary. You see, all cures work eventually, don't they. The sickness either goes away or you go away. But I've been using lots of words this morning, and that's what it's all about. You looked at that title and you wondered, what he's going to talk about this morning? Words do have their use, let's just look – and they're ambivalent in their use - - and multi-faceted in their use. Let's just look at that word "spelling" – well you think about spelling it out. Is he going to spell it out this morning as to what this is all about? We talk about being "under a spell." Is he going to talk about being under the spell of God. So even the word, spell, is interesting, isn't it? Some time ago, well I guess they're still using it, there as an ad asking a question– how do you spell "relief"? Now, don't tell me. We could say, "How do you spell 'salvation'?" How DOES one spell salvation? G-O-D

The word God is used mostly – and perhaps more commonly, perhaps today, as an expletive - as a portion of profanity – occasionally one says it with more reverence "Oh God." Kind of a prayer, as if one is in a bind or a bad situation. What must I do? What do I do to get out of this? But there's another word that's used quite frequently, not in the ordinary street parlance but in religious terms. It's probably taken for granted just as much, and that word is gospel. Gospel. It's a word also of many meanings. It was a music hit years ago which is revived every once in a while . It is rediscovered by each generation, it's called "Godspell." The gospel word does have both God and spell in it. It's God spiel – or talk about – it's news about God – thus Good News – it is the story of the relationship of God to human beings. The Gospel is probably one of the most frequently used words in the New Testament, and is used exclusively in the New Testament, It is used in relationship to a unique, historical event in God's time. All through the New Testament, it is used over and over and over again in these kinds of phrases – the gospel of the kingdom – the gospel of God – the gospel of Christ or Jesus Christ. The word of the gospel. The gospel of his son. The gospel of the grace of God. The gospel of peace. The mystery of the gospel. You also find used over and over again and particularly in the letters of Paul, that preaching the gospel is the imperative which binds and drives all persons who come under the gospel.

There is a warning, constantly given against those who preach another – or contrary gospel – or seek to pervert the gospel. But what IS the gospel, really?

The gospel is based upon the fact of God's prior initiative – God without any stimulus, on his own, without even any wishful cry from others decided to act and he acted to save his people – his people who were willy nilly moving clear away from his intentions for them. His people who were abusing the globe upon which they were placed abusing each other in acts of destruction and exploitation. He acted to save his people. He set in motion a process of interrelationships and communication with his people through a particular person namely his son, Jesus Christ. The center of the gospel is this divine message – this divine act in Jesus the Christ. The anointed one, the chosen one of the Lord. The center of the gospel is Jesus the Christ. Jesus then becomes the message. The word of the God to his people – is Jesus the Christ.

But then how is Jesus the gospel. Basically the gospel is not just the story of the acts and teachings of Jesus – rather it is the special relationship that Jesus had to his Father, his Father God and the saving act of God through Jesus in dying on the cross and resurrecting for our salvation. Thus the gospel is not compiled of good works but works are the fruits of the gospel. You are not saved for all eternity by good works –but we are already saved by the work of God. So what is the gospel? And salvation? Even though God took the initiative, the gospel is a two-way street. God took the initiative, but we must listen to that initiative, to that news, and respond. It is not a salvation in isolation for it is also a salvation related to community – a kingdom. The gospel is not that God saves ME. The gospel then involves God's prior act through Jesus Christ – to remove one from cosmic bondage –from the nature of things in which we find ourselves, the very nature of which we have created in this world. To remove us from that inevitable drive to self-destruction back to the possibility of permanence and eternity. The goal, then, of gospel redemption is the removal from life all that renders human life worthless. So receiving the gospel and believing it empowers one to be a true person and to do all that is required to enhance the kingdom of God including enduring suffering and persecution. We are resurrected with Christ from the old incapable life and made capable of a life in harmony with God's saving plan – thus the meaning for the word "born again." That brings a dilemma to many people who are in difficulty today. For if one abuses their body, particularly through chemical additives, they may destroy their ability to listen to and respond to the bondage breaking message in Jesus Christ. That is the reason that persons like that need to be be surrounded and not dropped off and helped so they can be brought to the place where they can hear the word of Christ saying, "You may be free."

But what of the gospel and the kingdom. We become part of the kingdom process, but we do not bring it in. The kingdom or fulfillment of it happens in spite of all of our resolutions at conventions, of all our offerings that we take with good intentions and all the demonstrations – how well conceived. We cannot force the kingdom of God in as though we could have one five-year plan after another to bring in perfection. We've seen this happen in several great nations of the world where they've mightily striven with a great deal of idealism to bring in the planned society and a planned economy and have found that the human reluctance to be perfect - has foiled their efforts. Even in some of the most successful situations, we still have the theme that it is competition and adversarial striving that brings the best – even as bad as it is – out of human beings. I'm afraid that there is no economic system yet on the face of this earth that can bring to the human being the answer to his problems – namely a situation where we do not pollute and destroy our habitat or nor be involved in acts of terrorism and war. There is no economic system what can happen without human beings redeemed, accepting the gospel of Jesus Christ – change in nature and then from that nature give light to their surroundings. They must leaven the lump, yeast the dough.

That is the challenge to Christians. We become a part of the kingdom process where Jesus within us helps us to find our own nature and to be in a sense, in the athletic sense, able to play over our heads better than we really are. For the ultimate fulfillment for the kingdom of God is in God's hands and in his time. The scriptures speak of watching and waiting for the completion of the kingdom, for the day of the Lord. It also speaks over and over again that connected with this is the day of judgment. The scripture speaks of living in expectancy for the unexpected. We know not the day nor the hour when the kingdom will come, when God and his Son will rule our lives.

Well, what should we say about the Gospel and those who have accepted the gospel? Once one has accepted God's grace, that is, God's initiative on our behalf, one does not sit still. It is not a complacent life – a holy compulsion seizes the person who is really converted and this, by the way, is the test of whether one has heard the gospel and believed. If we used this litmus test against the members of the church, against ourselves looking in the mirror, this may be a test of whether or not we have truly heard and truly believed. For a Christian, one who has heard the gospel and accepted it is a restless, active human being. One becomes a proclaimer of the gospel. For the gospel is not something that is heard and kept and buried instead, it is like a virus that seizes the whole being and turns it into something that it was not. When one has heard the gospel, one becomes a proclaimer, and one proclaims by word and deed and relationship not only from the pulpit, least of all from the pulpit, but in all manner of audiences at work, at play, in all relationships.

By word, by deed, by the nuance of every human psychological expression. Jesus told his disciples to preach the gospel. Paul's letters are full of admonition to preach the gospel. He said, "Woe is me if I fail to or do not preach the gospel." A preacher – preachers of the gospel, then, are apostles, ones sent out, but they are not the only ones. The sending is not just for those ordained by the placing of a hand on one's head and saying, "Go and preach the gospel." It is automatic that when anyone is converted, one has received the gospel, and begins to breathe the gospel. It is automatic that one becomes an apostle. Our colleagues in this world, known as the Jehovah's Witnesses believe that everyone becomes a witness the minute they accept the lordship of Christ. That's exactly right, everyone is an apostle. The age of the apostleship is not over. We talk about the apostles as the first disciples of Jesus, plus Paul. The actual situation is that every Christian who hears the gospel is sent out by that gospel, and thus, is an apostle.

The proclaimers of the gospel are so filled with the spirit that they feel miserable if they are not totally involved in proclaiming that message. They bear a message which involves life everlasting, righteousness and joy and peace in the holy spirit. We live and abide in the word of God, we become literally the word of God. Christ is in us, showing forth his glory. Whether we like it or not, once we accept the gospel, we become the gospel today. Now the gospel gives power. The power of the Christian is the abiding presence of God of the Holy Spirit within. The ongoing ability to continue to persevere is the promise of the gospel. The gospel, then, is the actual presence of God working in us and through us, and that is an awesome responsibility.

It's like being told that now you're old enough to wash and put away the finest crystal and the expensive china. Perhaps, that is an example that you cannot understand. Maybe you never had to do dishes. You have dishwashers and plastic throwaways. I can remember my mother saying, "I'll do the fine things, and you do the others." It was considered a part of household chores for boys and girls. I was not reared as a macho fella. I learned to do the dishes, to cook, and to sew, and all the rest of those sorts of things, and I'm thankful. Then one time, she said, "I'll let you wash the crystal and the fine china." I want to tell you, I was nervous. I remember the first time a dish clinked on the divider between the sinks. Fortunately, it didn't break. That was an awesome responsibility, and that's what a gospel is – it's such a precious commodity, however, it is not breakable! The breaking comes in us whether we have faith enough as Paul says, "Faith and faith to trust God and the power of the Holy Spirit to carry us, earthen vessels as we are, into all aspects of life, living it, and being exemplary of the gospel. We have benefitted from the power of God which is able to move persons to accept the reconciliation that God offers. Our test then in our lives is to spell out what God has done through human

beings, for human beings, through Jesus Christ. Salvation is spelled G-O-D. What, then, are the assumptions of the gospel?

The first is the reality of God. God exists. In spite of our tendency today to live as though we don't need him. Secondly, God loves us, he cares for us. He has and still does. Thirdly, through his grace, his own initiative, he has pardoned us for all our failures, all of our weaknesses, for all of our inability to live up to those ideals that we espouse. Fourthly, he grants us salvation and eternal life. Salvation and eternal life. Salvation is freedom from all that besets and keeps us from being empowered to live qualitative lives even in this earth and forever. Eternal life is to be with God forever. Furthermore, he empowers us to live in obedience and trust through his Holy spirit. So if you trust and obey, for there's no other way, to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey. If we do, God stays with us. He gives us the commission in turn to preach the gospel and live a life of service to our fellows. God spelling? Gospel. The gospel of God loving us through Jesus Christ, and giving us the very qualities to live beautifully, and happily, and wholly even when we are persecuted and mocked. Even when we have slipped and fallen, God is there to renew us. The gospel is not just in my salvation, but our salvation. The gospel, the community of those who in faith accept what God has done for them.

Let us pray....we thank you Lord for the gospel of Jesus Christ, and we thank you that you have caused us to hear it, and we pray, oh God, that we may be worthy channels of your gospel into the lives of many others. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

God of the Living
Covenant Christian Church
May 24, 1987

Scripture Matt. 22:23-33

As a lad growing up, the emphasis was upon remembering the valiant dead. They talked about the honorable way to fight and to die. As a lad, I read about knighthood when it was in flower. When one would meet on the jousting field, or in single combat, to defend the honor of a fair lady, it was a day when they eulogized the single-handed valor of Sergeant York, that Tennessee marksman, who picked off a machine gun nest with his marksmanship and saved his buddies.

It was a day when we eulogized valiant warriors. Alfred Lord Tennyson did in his poem, the Charge of the Light Brigade,

"Half a league, half a league, half a league onward. All in the valley of death rode the six hundred. Forward the light brigade. Charge for the guns, he said, into the valley of death rode the six hundred. Cannon to the right of them. Cannon to the left of them. Cannon behind them. Volley'd and thunder'd, storm'd at with shot and shell, while horse and hero fell. They that had fought so well came through the jaws of death, back from the mouth of hell. All that was left of them, left of six hundred. When can their glory fade? O the wild charge they made! All the world wondered. Honor the charge they made, honor the Light Brigade. Noble six hundred."

I remember as a child poems like these. "Hats off. Along the street there comes a blur of bugles, a ruffle of drums, a flash of color beneath the sky. Hats off, the flag is passing by. "

Oliver Wendell Holmes had a long poem on the flag, one verse of which reads, "God bless the flag and it's loyal defenders, while it's broad folds o'er the battlefield wave. Till the dim star-wreath rekindle its splendors. Washed from its stains in the blood of the brave."

There were other poems that came in, that began to cause younger people to ask questions. You remember Colonel John McCrae's poem, In Flanders Field.

"In Flanders Fields the poppies blow, between the crosses row on row, that mark our place; and in the sky, the larks, still bravely singing, fly. Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago we lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow, loved and were loved, and now we lie in Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe. To you from failing hands we throw. The torch; be yours to hold it high. If ye break faith with us who die, we shall not sleep, though poppies grow in Flanders fields."

What of the day? This is the day we remember. What is the value of such remembrance? Actually, today people scurry to and fro. Who remembers? What percentage of us are truly remembering. Why remember? Partly to teach the young that it is they that bury the dead. It is they that carefully hold and take them to their final bed. Mainly we remember to remind us of our own mortality. Also to remind us of our origin, our genealogy. We return to the graves of our ancestors and began to wonder what their life was like. Try to picture in our minds their physique, their temperament. Once in awhile speculate and say, and he acts like Uncle Ben.

The world over, the remembrance of the dead is a part of the acts of the living. In some areas of even greater interest and involvement than we do in this country. In the Italian cemeteries, I remember when we were visiting as a family, beautiful sculpture, lifelike sculpture, particularly of those prematurely dead. And in more modern times, glazed pictures embossed or fastened upon, the tombstones. There you could see the pictures of increasing generations of persons. It kind of got to you. When you realized that going through some of those cemeteries that there were graves that were centuries old and every once in a while a stark figure leaped out at you.

Just a few years ago, my wife and I went on a trek with sister and brother-in-law, out into the rural areas, beyond Moscow, out in wooded areas, down a long lane, and finally to a remote cemetery. Nestled there, among a lot of growth, not far away, a church, with its golden onion-like steeple up against a blue sky, flecked with racing white clouds.

As we moved through there, we saw pictures of loved ones fastened to the stones and beautifully decorated graves, well-attended. This was not on a special day and on we went hunting for a particular grave, the grave of Pasternak, an author that had fallen from grace. Remember Doctor Zhivago? We found the grave, beautifully decorated, well-attended. The flowers were put there by authors and artists, who yet honored him.

All around the world, and particularly the Orient, in spite of their move into the modern age, they revere their ancestors and remember from whence they have come.

It is important that we do so. It is important that we remember that we did not begin our lives, nor will we be able to finish our lives. Someone gave birth to us and attended to us and someone will attend to us on the other end. That's part of the responsibility of those who were living, younger, to help in the transition to bring new generations in and usher out the older generations. With the day's mobility and our intense preoccupation with our business responsibilities, it's very hard to memorialize. It's very hard for us to listen to the truth that comes from the dead. People are buried by professionals, and in some cases, with no one attending. There are persons, who this day are called upon to tend and stoke the furnaces of finality, while the rest of us have our leisure. This day, there are families, scattered, that are awaiting to get together, because there is no peace. War is not in a distant country only, it's here in our midst.

It is important that in this day of memorializing the dead that we not neglect the fact that dead is dead and life is living. Jesus Himself was rather hard upon those who wanted to make excuses and he said, let the dead bury the

dead. This is a rather hard statement. But I think Jesus was more interested, not in theological questions about what happens to the dead and resurrection. For the statement, let the dead bury the dead, suggests that we must be very busy about our responsibilities today to the living.

Then there's another statement, which he made to the Sadducees, when he said, God is not a God of the dead, but God is a God of the living. That passage which they brought to Jesus, a logical dilemma, dealing with the rites of marriage, whose wife would she be? He properly bypassed and said the important thing, is what you're doing today. The affirmation that he made of the nature of God, that God is a living, viable presence here and now. I chose to interpret the emphasis on the fact that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were mentioned, not that they were still alive, but that those who are alive on earth may know true life when they know and serve God.

God is real to the living. He's not real to the dead. God's necessity, God's reality, is to us, who live and breathe. He is the dynamic force of life. He is not something remote and detached. That was Jesus's message. I think that one may be theoretically alive, that is be walking and eating, and be dead. The Christian is one who is alive in the true sense. The Christian is one in whom God dwells as the vital force. As one whose life comes alive, because he is serving God here and now.

God is not a God of the dead, but of the living. Many speak about being dead and suddenly now becoming alive in Christ, as an emotional, real religious experience.

Jesus's message was that of life abundantly. It was not just life, but abundant life. There is actual power in the blood of the Lamb. That's what it means. Not just some magic for salvation in a life to come, but live power here and now. Thus, to be born again in Christ is to be lifted from self to serving others. From being dead in one's self to be living in others. The resurrection and the mortality began with Jesus's death and resurrection and with us to the death of our old self and arising anew in Christian baptism to the new self, and an understanding of what it is that God is. He is a living, vital force within us.

We understand, as reborn Christians, that God does not just reign over the dead, or on a judgment throne, in heaven, but here, and now if we accept him into our lives.

The importance of Memorial Day then is not just to remember the dead, but to remember that God is alive for us today and to remember that if we choose on this day to acknowledge that fact, we can go from this day enlivened and enabled, with a sense of purpose and a sense of direction. The little irritations

and the disappointments fall in their place and become increasingly but little irritations, like the flight of a gnat in our life, because the greater preoccupation, the greater devotion, the greater expression of our life is because God is in us, living.

Dead are dead. But in God, we must live our lives.

Focus

Covenant Christian Church

1987

Scripture Mt 13:44-46 & Phil. 3:1-11

Today let us turn our attention to some thoughts under the general title of Focus.

Those of you who are hunters know that when a flock of birds flies over head, one does not simply point the gun in general at the flock and blaze away. Rather one is more likely to have success when he draws a bead on one bird and concentrates on that one. The same way I have discovered, maybe you have too, when at night in the summer time you are asleep in the bed and all of a sudden you are awakened hearing that buzzing sound. A mosquito is in the room. You know very well that just to swing in the dark does not do it. You have got to concentrate and focus on that sound. Let me give you a suggestion. Cover up everything but one ear and leave it sticking out from under the sheet. Have one hand poised ready by that ear but still slightly out from under the edge of the sheet. and listen and focus on that sound. It will come closer and closer and closer and stop . Count to five and then swing You will get the mosquito, blood and all. Yes, your ear may ring but if you have that swing you will get the the mosquito. It is the same way about ordinary things in life. You concentrate, if you are to be successful, on one thing at a time.

Even when you are dressing in the morning you put one article on at a time. If you don't believe me men try tying your shoes laces and you necktie at the the same time. Women try combing your hair and putting your girdle on at the same time. That would be a picture! Not only do you need two hands too pull it up but you would need four hands to stuff it in. Men, shame on you . There you sit laughing. You should realize that there are lot of girdles sold to men these days.

No, if you are going to function in life properly you focus on what you are doing. Can you imagine a person running a table saw visiting with a friend or neighbor, while pushing a piece of wood through the saw and at the same time fiddling with something else. You know what would happen. Multiple occupation or even absent mindedness would bring a drastic result. The hand splint apart. The fingers severed, blood spurting. We know what it is when you do not concentrate on what you are doing in ordinary life. Life becomes a shambles. One of the evidences of mental deterioration is the inability to focus attention and concentrate and carry out any sort of consecutive procedure. Focus, concentration, deliberation on one thing at a time is the process that makes life possible and successful.

What shall we say about excellence? Excellence has never come in any area of life, unless an individual focuses on one thing and masters it. Whether it be the skill of music, the skill of craftsmanship, the skill of abstract thinking, the skill of physical prowess. Whatever it is, it takes training, focusing and concentrating.

You see, folks, if this is true in natural life, in all aspects, it is doubly true with the Christian life. Our trouble is not that the Christian life is so difficult and that it is. Our trouble is not that the Christian life is something so ethereal and so abstract and that it may be. Our trouble is not that the Christian life demands so much, and that it does. Our trouble is that we are not willing to give to it what we give to other phases of our lives. Let us desire something that money can purchase and we have it not. We either save to buy it or we sign notes of credit, which then causes us to focus our earnings on the gain of that prize.

In the Christian life, somehow we feel that we can relate to it casually. Put our hand into the table saw, the band saw of life, and also try to work in terms of Christianity. We don't focus on Christianity, but it is only one part of many interests that we have. Jesus taught that the Kingdom is like a treasure in the field, which takes all of our possessions to buy that field. He also said that the Kingdom is like finding a fine pearl which forces us to convert all of our resources in order to buy that pearl.

What these teachings are saying is that the Christian life demands everything. The focus and concentration of everything is on attaining the Christian life. In fact, Paul followed up his master's teaching by expanding the concept. Jesus has said, all of our possessions must go to buy it. Paul said, that all of our possessions are worthless in contrast to the goal, the acquisition of the Christian way. You see, our dilemma is that we approach the Christian life in a scatterbrained fashion. We attend some services. We list ourselves as

believers. We go tsk, tsk, tsk at evil. We give alms to worthy causes. But the Bible says that we should devote our total lives.

Now what does "devote" mean? Devote means, in the most primitive sense, that something is taken and given completely over to the Divinity. This may actually be the first born child in ancient times who was sacrificed, killed. Abraham faced up to this and came to know under God's instruction that no longer did one have to devote one's first born male child. But devotion is still necessary, in a different way. We do not have to literally slaughter our most precious thing or ourselves for God, but we must give ourselves as a living sacrifice to God. Our total selves. We must, in a sense, let our spiritual hair grow. Stop trying to trim our hair and shave, so that we can pass as squares in the ordinary aspect of life. But rather, just forget about what other people think and let our hair grow, on and on and on, untouched by the world. Our spiritual hair, that is.

We must be single-minded, single-purposed and not let ourselves become distracted by all of the distaff of life. In a sense, to be truly Christian is to be truly radical, truly far out. For any person who would truly follow the admonition of Paul, would be so different that his presence, her presence, would start making a difference in the life around them. You say, how beautiful, yet how unreal, how impractical. That's fine. I've thought the same thoughts. I've wanted to do the same thing. But it's not possible. Life is real and life is earnest and there's no way that a person can live that way. There's no way that a person can truly be Christian. After all, we've got to pay attention to the ordinary things of life. We've got animals to feed. We've got shops to tend. We've got earth to move. We've got young people to teach.

How can one be a Christian? The sort of the thing you're talking about means you just have to drop out and not align yourself with this compromising world. But friends, we've been taught that we should seek first the Kingdom of God. If our focus is right and proper, all of the things and responsibilities that we have will take their place and God will lead us and give us the strength to handle what we have to. Well then what is the objective that we focus on? I think this is our problem today. We focus too much on being good, on being righteous, on being nice, on being proper, on being well thought of. When you look at these things, what happens? Then we try to strike a bargain.

What's really nice? Well, in my father's generation, to be totally abstemious of alcoholic beverages was being nice. Today, that is too hard, we couldn't do that. Today, it's holding your liquor. It's being able to have in your bar, in the basement or in your den, the right kind of selection. Now in Iowa, it's getting possible to get the better kinds of wines, so we can have the good life. What's being nice? It's keeping your house properly painted, your hedge trimmed,

and dandelions out of your grass. By the way, that'll soon be time again. They've already started advertising the kinds of drugs that you can give to your grass and your lawn, which will guarantee you the kind of lawn you should have, which makes you a right guy. Incidentally, if I may put in my word, as a bee keeper, dandelions are one of the early first sources for surplus honey. So I scatter dandelion seeds all over the community.

Friends, you see what we do? We have standards of what is nice, what is right and what is proper and we spend money and we try to maintain the balance. Furthermore, we have other ways of doing it. At least we used to before we got TV and pornographic shows. We used to have a situation whereby men would get together for stags, whether it be a service club, well not so much a service club, but a secret order society. Or men who enforce the law. It's so hard to be proper that we get together once in a while and we have a party and then we bring in some gals, with decorations like frosting around a cake and then they burst out without any decorations.

Now you laugh, but my friends, just look at the life we live, the good "Christian" American life. We're not focusing on Christianity, we're not being truly radical. Why is it? Because we've lost our Christian focus. The focus in life is based upon the fact that we're not just ordinary animals, we have souls. If you don't believe it, then you don't dig it, and you might as well get out.

We have a soul, from God. The intent of that soul is to focus on returning to God, to dwell with him forever. The true focus of Christianity, the objective of a Christian is to become reunited with God. The truth is, it can begin now. God's Holy Spirit dwells about and close to us and can unite with our souls. We can be increasingly united with God. In this union we become His stewards on earth to dress and to keep it and perform our stewardship duties, according to His will. Yes, we may continue to do many of the same things, but with a whole different outlook. There's direction and help for attaining this union. For God does not put us here alone and severed from Him. He came in human form himself, as Jesus, the Christ, to show us the way, to teach us and to take upon his own being the simple burdens which keep us, which keep us from willing to be God's person.

You see, our bodies with our souls, our physical being on this earth, are not enemies. God created them and gave them to us to work in His creation. If these bodies get behind the focus of the soul, which is to unite with God and relate to God, in order to dwell with him forever, then increasingly, we can sublimate our desires and bring ourselves back into tune with God. The mind's work is to think the thoughts of God. The vocabulary of the Christian is the basis for that thought and dialogue and our task is to learn the mind of God. When Christians submit their bodies and minds and spirits to God, it brings for

them happiness. Yes, but not happiness in the sense of the world. Happiness that is a peace that passes understanding. Happiness in the midst of sorrow and tribulation and persecution.

It brings also integration of personality. Not integration in a "Dale Carnegie" sense. Certainly there are byproducts similar, but integration in that the personality becomes united behind the focus of the soul to dwell with God forever. That personality then has the kind of consistency, which can be read by others and can be emulated by others. When Christians submit their bodies, minds and souls or spirits to God, it gives them a singularity in the direction for life.

Lastly and most important, it gives to them the opportunity for eternal salvation. To be united with God's purpose here and to continue forever with him. We have Jesus's example before us. We have the teachings of the Scripture in front of us. We have the possibility, because God, Himself in Jesus, has overcome the burdens that are in our lives, to enable us to willfully turn against our natural impulses and say, oh God, I believe. Help my unbelief.

So friends, let this be a day when you intensify your focus. Sharpen the lens on Jesus Christ. If you do that, day after day you'll find your life falling into order and your sense of purpose having reason and meaning to you. You'll have strength to endure all things, whatsoever life gives you. But most of all, you shall know the satisfaction and joy that what you do, however small, against all the adversity of life, will be like a mustard seed planted, growing and spreading. What you do is a part of God's ordained hope for his creatures. Yield yourself to God. Try it, you really will like it.

Are You Ready
Covenant Christian Church
April 5, 1987
Scripture Mt. 5:36-44

You're all aware of the ambiguity of the English language, I'm sure. We have a grandson, who uses the English language increasingly, even more precisely than his grandparents. He was born and is being reared in England, although that doesn't guarantee that all English people speak English according to the King's English. If you've ever tried to understand some of the dialects, Cockney and otherwise, you'll find that they are speaking many languages, certainly not American over there.

Anyway, he has a very interesting command. He says, "ready, ready, ready." And I couldn't quite get through my mind initially what he meant. But what he meant was he was ready for his grandparent to read to him. His grandparent should not get ready to read, but immediately read to him. The term, "ready, ready, ready," can also be said, "ready, ready, ready." He hasn't learned the distinction yet between getting ready and the command "read to me." The word "ready" goes way back to a Greek word meaning to rhyme. It has no relation to the word "read," but it is a word which carries not only the emphasis for action, but also describes a trait of character, as well as describing a condition of a situation, or even a scene.

I remember the word in relationship to a meal in my home. After the meal, it was my duty, on occasion, to "redd up" the dishes. How many of you have ever redded the dishes? Well, some of you have some Kentucky background. All to make them ready for washing. The person who redded the dishes also wiped them. We also had to ready our rooms, and that was always an ordeal. It was generally against the backdrop of mother saying, well, I've had it. I'm going to go into your rooms today and everything that's on the floor is going to be swept up and put in garbage bags and it's going out. Now mother didn't always follow that completely through. She would not do that, because I had noticed she would select out some aspects of clothes and they would go into the dirty clothes hamper. But toys and everything else that I considered precious would get into those garbage bags and it would take considerable wrangling, in order to ransom them.

You mothers, I think, probably still use that threat. How many of you mothers finally get so bad off, you simply say to the children, anything on the floor is going to be swept up and put in sacks and into the garbage. Well, I guess you still do that. But we had to redd our rooms. Make them ready. And mothers will say to school children, you must turn off the radio and get ready for school. Or they'll say, are you ready? The bus will soon be coming. Uh oh, you're not ready. Now you've missed the bus and I've got to get ready and drive you to school. How many of you have gone through that? The word "ready" is fundamentally a part of our life. We're in the track season. When I was a lad, they generally said, get ready, get set, and bang, or go. Now it's "on your marks, get set" and bang. Or if you're practicing, target practice. Or if you're being executed. You'll hear them say, "ready, aim," you may not hear, fire.

Husbands learn to wait while wife gets ready to go out. She's all ready. Then she decides to change a skirt. That seems to be mean changing the hose and shoes, too. But then she has to change the purse. So she dumps the contents from one on the bed and sorts out to put in another purse, which

matches in color. Finally she's ready and you get to the door. She says, that tie doesn't go with your suit and you run down and change ties and she stands at the door waiting patiently for you to finish getting ready. Men, have you ever gone through that tactic? I'm tell you, these ladies have a way to really put the psychology on you.

I deliberately have spent time on the phrase, "getting ready." For it's very important that we realize something that's important to our understanding of our religious practice. For we have let go something which is very, very important. The big appeal of the electronic church preachers, about whom you're hearing so much today is a proper appeal. That is the appeal to people to give themselves to Christ and to get ready for His coming. To be ready for Him. It's the appeal to the eternal aspects of one's living.

But following that appeal, they goober it all up another appeal, which is for money, money, money, money for programs, which replicate and duplicate programs already being carried forth by people covenanting together in local congregations and unfortunately, diverting much of this income to the cost of maintaining their media presence. But they are very right in the emphasis on beyond this life and the emphasis upon the Kingdom of God and the return of Christ. There's probably no people in the world in the present time, who more properly emphasize this, to their credit and to their growth. It is the Jehovah's Witnesses, whose very name says, we are witnesses of God, the Jehovah.

They do this under the sense of impending crisis that the world will be changing and the Parousia and paradise will come. My friends, you and I have not paid enough attention to that. We tend to sort of retire away from persons who begin to press us in these areas.

How does one get ready for the coming of the Kingdom of God? Jesus taught of readiness. He taught of the maidens and their lamps, who were waiting for the bridegroom to come for the celebration of the wedding feast. Some were prepared for any eventuality, others only for the normal schedule. But the bridegroom was delayed and some were not prepared with sufficient oil to enter into the celebration and while they went to get oil, the doors were closed. There's much emphasis modern day preaching on the "in as much" teaching on the day of judgment, when Christ said in effect, "In as much as, you did not do this or you did do this to the least of these, you do or don't share in the Kingdom."

So we tend to emphasize the works in this life that we must be doing for people who are down and out and deprived and lost and suffering, imprisoned, sick. My friends, to emphasize that, overemphasize it and emphasize it to the exclusion of equal emphasis and perhaps even more

emphasis upon preparing one's soul for the coming of the Kingdom, is not to preach the full Gospel.

You see, we tend to neglect what church people should be doing and where they should be involved, when Christ returns to usher in the Kingdom. For you see our task is not ourselves, to necessarily even be involved in good works, in terms of even food bank and all these things, as poor as people are. But the point is that it doesn't take a Christian to be sensitive to needs of other human beings.

For there are people in other religions who have similar beliefs and there are people who are very humanistic and atheistic, who have humanitarian concerns. Christianity is not just a humanitarian expression. Christianity involves a total concept of time. The past, the present and the future. In fact, it involves a relationship which is timeless eternity.

The ideal posture for a Christian then is to be anxious about those who do not know Christ and have not been brought to His Church. The ideal temperament for a Christian should be that temperament which is filled with anxiety for those who have not yet been touched by Christ's message. The idea position or place or activity for a Christian to be involved in, when Christ returns, then you can guess, is actually be speaking to someone else, be working with someone else, bringing them to Christ. This means evangelism.

Being caught in church, even being in prayer, will not necessarily give a person a better chance of being chosen for the Kingdom of God, if one at other times does not actively share the Gospel. It seems that actually being in the act of working with another for their salvation to give themselves to Christ is a more certain ticket to paradise. Otherwise, we should, day-in and day-out, moment by moment, have on our minds and our hearts specific persons that we are concerned about, pray about, speaking with, working beside, to bring them to Christ. That's what good church membership, good church citizenship, is all about. It is not enough, my friends, to just be good.

A successful businessman one time was queried about his success by a young person. This businessman answered the question, to what do you account your success? He said, one must learn to jump when opportunity comes. And the bright young person, but how can I tell when opportunity comes? And the businessman answered, you can't, you just keep jumping. That's exactly the way it is with the Kingdom of God. You can't tell when the Kingdom of God is going to come, but you keep evangelizing, constantly working.

We have a problem with church growth. That problem is ourselves. It's the lack of church growth. Local congregations, even whole denominations that are not growing, are condemned to disappear. Even uniting two receding denominations will not prolong the life of either one. In fact, the process may divert each from the important task of proselyting as they become preoccupied with the minutia of the process of institutional and doctrinal amalgamation, as well as becoming enamored and intoxicated by the sweet smelling incense of ecumenical gatherings under the slogan of unite so that the world may believe.

Incidentally, the statement, unite so the world may believe, does not, in my mind, refer to institutional union. Rather, it deals with dogmatic attitudes in a local church and individuals quarreling over personal loyalties and doctrinal manners, not only diverts energies, divides effort, which should be given to evangelism but also becomes then a spectacle to the non-Christian world. So what we face today then is we must dwell in the spirit of expectancy. In this expectancy be active, to fulfill what we expect to come. As we dwell in the believing community, even being animated with the common hope of Jesus's return, is not a sufficient guarantee that one would be included in that Kingdom. It's not that one is righteous or good, but that one is concerned and working for the salvation of others.

I acknowledge the general teaching emphasis of Jesus. I acknowledge that He taught that there are moral and spiritual qualities in the life and that the continued performance of duties are required of members of the Christian community. But, I would emphasize that the chief requisite for a Christian is witnessing to others against the impending, if uncertain time, of the return of Jesus Christ. For each one of us, there will be a specific time for that return. Some in the fullness of life, some at the beginning, some at the end. But wherever, we must be in the activity of witnessing.

Our conversion and subsequent membership in the church, belonging to the body of Jesus Christ, bestowed upon us certain special gifts and powers, which we are to use and in using, to enhance and multiply the numbers of persons within the church. If Christ should return and say to us, to you and me, I gave you my message. To how many have you given my message? How many have you brought to hear and receive my saving grace for their lives? We might well hear, at the end of that query, the same judgment that came down upon the people with their talents and those who failed to increase them.

Somehow or another, we slack off, become preoccupied with our place in this world and our lamps go untrimmed and we run out of oil. We yield to unbridled indulgence, get sucked into the misuse of authority and do not carry

out the trust that was laid on us by Jesus Christ. We have given up being watchful and alert. We do not build up an attitude of constant concern for Christ's Kingdom coming. Such neglect, I insist, bears the threat of being excluded entirely from the high fellowship of God and his Son. Jesus came to seek and to save the lost, and that is exactly what we should be doing as did his disciples.

In Mark 8:38, Jesus is ashamed of those who are ashamed of him. Is that the reason why we're not talking to people about our conversion? About the love Jesus Christ has, not only for us, but for these other people? Are we ashamed of being Christian? Of acting like the Seventh Day Adventists or all those Witnesses that go from door to door? We're too polite? We're too cultured? We're too uptight to do that sort of thing. My friends, they do not own that method. They do not have a special permission from God to do that. Yes, they do. But we do too and we should be doing it. In Luke 12:8, Jesus said, those who knowledge me. I, in turn, will acknowledge them before my Father in Heaven.

How do you knowledge Jesus? By testifying to others about His love and the strength he's given you. If we are alarmed by these leaders of the electronic church, if we are dismayed by the growth of Jehovah's Witnesses, who are the fastest growing Christian group in the world today, if we feel dismay and helplessness at the receding membership in our own denomination, there's only one answer to all of this, and that's to look in the mirror, of our own lives and say, "When have I said to another, I must tell you about what Jesus has done for me."

What it does means to be a Christian? I would invite you to come with me and share in this community of Christian love, which is the Covenant Christian Church. You do that and you will, for the first time in your life find out what it really means to be Christian and have such satisfaction that will surpass anything that you ever striven for, any goal. I can say, ladies, men, it's even better than making your goal in Weight Watchers. The experience of leading another person to Jesus Christ can never be topped. The experience of standing beside someone in their struggle, to wrest their soul literally from the devil and to bring it ransomed back to God. That experience of standing beside a person like that is the most rewarding experience that can come to anyone.

Yes, we get preoccupied with our families, with our immediate needs. Time runs out and strength runs out. But friends, one of the greatest guarantees for members of our own family, to really get sufficiently inoculated with the virus of Christianity, is for them to see that you've got it and to be witnessing to others. Now that sounds kind of pious, doesn't it? But how many I've dealt

with after they've become addicted or after the accident from alcoholism and all that sort of thing have said, oh, I wish I'd known what I know now, to give me the strength to make the decisions I need to make. You see, Christian love is not fully expressed in charity and good works. It begins with loving a person so much that you want them to know salvation.

You have heard it said, "It doesn't do any good to preach to persons about salvation if they have empty stomachs." So, we rationalize ourselves out of preaching about salvation. You preach about salvation and you'd be surprised how also comes the effort to fill the stomachs. But if we just fill stomachs, it's interesting how salvation does not come and stomachs and souls remain empty again and again and again.

And so, my fellows, of Covenant Christian Church, if you're really serious, as you go into this Easter time, as you call new leadership, if you're serious about being Christian, you begin today, thinking specifically of that person or persons you're going to begin to work on for Jesus Christ. It may be the next door neighbor, your associate at work, or even a person who walks by your house, keeping in condition, and you can conveniently be out there starting a conversation. You will be surprised how easily it goes. It does, so easily. You can open up a conversation because people are so hungry. For every person who turns you down, there'll be 90 and 9 who will open to you.

I got just a bit of it this spring, fishing in the surf of the gulf, surrounded by "spring breakers." With them it was so easy to turn from fishing to religion. In most of the cases, they responded in tremendous fashion.

That's our task and that is our need.

A New Beginning, Covenant Christian Church, January, 1987

Scripture John 2:23 to 3:1-21

I need not remind you, for already you've been too much reminded, that this is the age of entrapment, of frustration and resulting pessimism. Our political process, of which we are about to celebrate, has been besmirched. In our local community, the problem of human relations has provoked narrow and hateful reactions already. The economic situation is shaking our dream of plentiful consumerism. Raw materials squandered for decades are now both in short supply and also being demanded by an increasing world population, aroused to the siren song of the technological age. In Des Moines, it costs as

much again to rid ourselves of our excrement and our garbage by most wasteful means, as it does to buy our drinking and washing water.

Three hundred years ago, our fathers came to this land to leave behind the corruption, the depressions, the plagues, the persecutions, the worn out soil, the poverty, the famine, the crowded conditions. They were seeking a new beginning in a new place. Geography was the key, in those days, to a new beginning. On this continent, different styles of community were attempted, leading eventually to the great compromise of 13 colonies in a constitution and a representative government. Three hundred years and more from those initial beginnings, and the coming of the first settlers in this country, to find a new place to go for new beginnings is hard to come by, if not impossible.

The people of the world, including North America, are finding that there is no place to flee from this evil day. Judaism, the great symbol of being forced to leave, to find more hospitable places, is in the ultimate frustration of not even being able to return to a homeland, which now already has been, for centuries, the homeland of others. Man can no longer seek solutions through new beginnings, by finding empty spaces, or by even displacing others.

What can we do? What have we left to do? You are familiar as I with the various advocacies of what man might do to enhance his quality of life. One is to lower the numbers of people through population control. It seems to be, through war and famine and flood and pestilence, that this goes on, as well as birth control. But it seems not to avail, for it only intensifies the dilemma of man. We've been told we need to conserve and recycle, and some try. We've been told we should disarm and turn our wealth into more economically productive products. We haven't really tried that. We've made agreements to put a top on the arms race, to which we're all striving mightily to arrive. We've been told that government needs to be reformed and bureaucracy diminished. With it, of course, comes the unemployment of those who lose their jobs.

One of the most popular aspects has to do with the human potential or schemes for more efficient self-realization and fulfillment. With greater or lesser value, according to the application and the devotees supporting them, there are many such programs, some of which I mention: behavior modification, chemical alteration or mind expansion, transcendental meditation, transactional analysis, sensitivity training, human relations seminars, vocational training, career education, transplants, reducing, diets and on and on and on.

The numerous types of activities and in practically every case, enterprises, for which people spend their money to go through certain disciplines, postures and positions and activities and exercises, to somehow bring the human being

into control, so that it might more adequately fulfill itself and realize the potential of humanity have given no "fix." As an historian, I must say, in this way, there's nothing new under the sun. For there are many analogous enterprises and situations back through the ages of man. as he has gone back and forth, to and fro, in his land and in his mind, seeking to find himself. In any age it seems, and this age, indeed, the trouble is in our motivation. It seems to be lacking. Why should I go 55 miles an hour, which is the great symbol of conservation, when no one else does.

Why should I get along on less, when our leaders are not setting the example. Even if I save scrap iron and aluminum and paper, who will buy it? Why should I invest in a two or three-year venture, when the economy is so fickle I could lose my shirt? These are the statements the best men are saying constantly. Even my insurance policies are inflated by the bad habits and poor health practices that in increasing numbers, the members of my insurance pool engage in. So I'll enjoy while I can and spend this year, as it leaves and the New Year as it come in, sitting around my color TV with my six-pack, enjoying the football games. I put it in the first person pronoun and I don't know that my six-pack will be the same as yours, because I don't indulge in those kind of beverages, and I assume you don't either. Or if you do, this will be your New Year's resolution, not to anymore.

But that's not the way out. The fatalistic, ultimate pessimistic way out. The Roman emperors gave the masses spectacles in the arenas all through the Roman empire, to keep the people occupied, even while the barbarians were restless on the frontier, soon to be sent pillaging across that frontier, by the pressure of Asiatic hordes against them. Pillaging the very civilization, which was known as the Pax Romana, the peace for the world guaranteed by Rome.

My friends, times are not going to get better. People are first going to have to become better. Yes, it means working harder, getting along lest wastefully, behaving more healthfully and living more unselfishly. But how can this happen?

If better times can only come when we become better ourselves, how can we begin anew? There is a way. A way which a certain man found centuries ago in the middle of the night. His name was Nicodemus. In a midnight bull session, he was taught some simple concepts, but so hard for a person to let go and believe or accept.

The new beginning, which he ran into that night, was by rebirth. Birth not of the body, of the physical, but of the spirit. The acceptance of the divine. The acknowledgment of the God dwelling within man. A new beginning, which was not ever to have an ending. A beginning without ending, eternal. A new

beginning, not in a new place, but in place and in time, to become placeless and timeless in existence. God spoke through his Son of his love and his desire that those creatures of his, created in his image, should live in love and in light and be a salvation for their followers.

My friends, Christians, followers of Christ, are the new beginners who, by example, lead others to the light of love and neighborliness, of which there can never be an oversupply or a corner on the market. From which is not wastage, but only a constant recycling, a real pass-it-on. Man's partnership with man can only come when man accepts his partnership with God. For man who accepts partnership with God has suddenly the knowledge and the strength and the realization of what his capacity is. Far beyond that which his body, his mind gives him, as a physical being. The potential of man has not yet been fathomed by significant numbers of people, that is, being reborn in the spirit and yielding to God's spirit working within. For such persons, work in the light and bear witness to the fact that they depend upon God and their strength comes from God.

Does America have the opportunity for a new beginning? For better times? I think not. Not in the old way. Not in terms of going to some new place to start again, but only in terms of stopping and halting and waiting where we are, to acknowledge and receive the spirit of God within. To leap up to his spirit as it comes down to us and there together be joined in a new beginning, which has been ours all along and needs only our acknowledgment.

So my friends, I wish for you a new beginning and, consequently, the happiest year that you have ever known and a year that shall never end.

Hold Me Tight
Covenant Christian Church
May 17, 1987
Scripture: Psalms 121

When I was very young and a very impressionable age, my father returned from a trip to St. Louis. He'd gone there for health reasons, but then he had stopped by and visited an orphanage which was run by our Benevolent Society in St. Louis. I can remember in vivid words how he described his experience.

This ex-football player, with broad chest and large arms, had come into that orphanage and a little child came up to him and impulsively he picked the child up and hoisted him into the air. All of a sudden, there were nearly 50 little ones gathered around, pleading for that same experience. After I suppose 20 or 30 hoists, even this football player was tired, so he sat down. They gathered around him clamoring to climb on his lap. They didn't want to sit, they wanted his arms around them. They wanted to be held and held tightly.

Some years later, after I was grown, Maxine and I were in Cleveland, Ohio at the Children's Home and suddenly, not remembering my father's experience, I impulsively reached out to a child. I was not the man he was so I did not lift the child up. I quickly sat down and was surrounded with scores of children wanting to be held and to be held tightly. Each one reluctantly giving way to the other one, as one by one they came within my embrace and I squeezed them. It seemed the harder, the more they liked it. Occasionally a hand would touch my face, or one would try to pull me down to kiss me.

When I was a young man in my first ministry, I remember going into Humeston, Iowa and stopping at a home in which the mother, alone, was dying of cancer. As I sat by her bed, her little daughter would climb into my lap and snuggle closely, for her father had disappeared. Weekend after weekend, she would sit on my lap and I would hold her. It wasn't enough just to have her sit, she wanted my arms around her to hold her tightly. Some years later, I had her son in class and discovered the previous relationship. This lady visited me in my office and guess what? She asked to sit on my lap and I held her tightly.

All through life, if you are aware the physical relationship of body to body is fundamental. I can remember one time when I had a croupy cough and I could not rest at night, as a little boy, and I struggled for my breath. My father came to me, picked me up and took me to his bed, put me on his large chest and put his arms around me. I woke up the next morning back in my bed. The warm of my father's body and the security of his arms took me through the fright of that situation and relaxed me and put me to sleep. Basic, primitive medicine.

Another time when I was grown, I was in New York City on a leave, making a study for the National Council of Churches. In between times, I tried to take part in the glorious offerings in the Big Apple and I had gone to a dance recital. You would not believe it, but I am sort of a frustrated Nijinsky. I always thought that I could leap through the air, click my heels together, or get down on the ground and do some of those Russian Cossack dances.

I tell you, I was really far out in those days. Actually took dance lessons. Only I don't think I was very graceful or coordinated. I was an average acrobat. But I still maintained my interest in the dance. While in New York I went to a college dance recital. During the period of that recital, a sudden blizzard blew in from the sea. When I came out clad only in a topcoat the blizzard was already piling up drifts. I stood on the curb waiting for a bus to come. I was soon joined by a lady, who also had been to the dance recital. I just noticed because she had the program in her hands. We were strangers to each other, but as the storm came on and the buses were delayed and there seemed to be no lights appearing, anxiety began to draw us together and soon others were coming and standing in that place. After eight or 10 persons had gathered and the bus was not coming, I suggested that they all go to an alleyway and hide around the corner out of the wind and the blizzard and we would take turns watching for the bus. I would take the first turn.

I took the turn. Pretty soon a stout black gentleman came out, I was the only white in the group, and he said, you've been here long enough, it's my turn. So I went back to the group and they were huddled together and I had the shakes. I was shaking so hard I couldn't control myself. Of course, this is Nature's way to warm up the body. The group opened up and put me in the middle. In the middle, against the building, was a large matronly black lady in a large fur coat and she said, "Honey, come in here," and she opened her fur coat. I was against a very "bosomly" lady, just shaking like everything. She put her arms around me and drew me ever closer. Pretty soon, I got over the shakes and I warmed up.

Fundamental is holding, holding tight. How often we go through life not realizing how fundamental it is to hold one another. As a sequel to that particular event, I noticed there were busses running several blocks down and I said, let's go down there and get on those buses. They replied that they didn't have transfers that were good. I said, follow me. The bus stopped when we got down there and I got on, the driver said, "Well those are not good here." I said, "They are tonight." He said, "You're right." I got on and all my new black friends got on too. They said "Goodbye, Reverend, "when I got off.

Life is full of opportunities to be close to people. But some way or another, those we are closest to, we don't get close to. To hold and be held is the basic cement of human relations, and actually the building blocks of community. The very phrase, "hold me tight," emphasizes much more than a casual relationship. It emphasizes a definite commitment. It says, "Don't let go, I need a basis for trust and security."

It says, "I'm in a precarious situation, and your presence stabilizes me. It says, I'm frightened, I'm scared, and your touch secures me. It says at least at this time I can't stand alone or by myself. If I'm not supported, I may even attempt to anesthetize myself in order to avoid reality." So true of so many

today, who seek the Goddess Morpheus, not in terms of the brief undertaking of sleep, but in the contemporary chemical dependency on morphine and all similar derivatives.

Holding emphasizes something more positive. A condition of mutual recognition. A situation of sharing. An embrace of mutual support and best wishes. Definitely it also means an embrace of commitment, the short symbol of which is the shaking of hands. Let me ask you, do you ever hold anyone tight anymore? Our style of life keeps us so busy we don't even have time to hold. With our friends, we keep it casual. If we get too close it may cost us emotional strength and even money to support them in their particular needs. We keep our neighbors friendly, but at a distance. Our family today is preoccupied, particularly with the boob tube.

I can remember when I was small, babysitters, generally older persons, who held one on their laps and read to them or sang to them, or sometimes just held them. How much that meant to me, for my parents were very busy and they were professionals, but they saw to it that wonderful people, people of the extended family and neighbors, accompanied us and we were not alone. Does your child rest easily in your arms? There is a time to hold and hug and to caress and assuage. There is also a time to free them and to teach them to fly from the nest. But always to feel free to return to the embrace.

In my counsel with young ladies in trouble from promiscuity, how many times I've asked them, do you ever remember sitting on your daddy's lap and having him hug you? Never did I find one who had had that genuine experience. Occasionally one spoke of an unhealthy relationship in terms of incest. But an experience of being loved by a human being, who is as close as one's father, was denied them and subsequently and consequently and in most of those cases, they were seeking their father in the arms of another man. There are many persons who go through life hunting and hungry because they did not receive the most primitive of all relationships, the satisfaction of being held.

Today we so emphasize the necessity of emotional stability, of independence, so that when problems come in human relations, we handle them in sterilized and clinical situations without any touching. Such situations are to be held by professionals with rubber gloves and by experts. When all that is really needed from the very beginning is a closeness that allows for genuine, physical human exchange.

In so many cases between husbands and wives, one can ask the question, what has happened to the mutual trust and support, which was symbolized by holding each other tightly together in an embrace, with no hidden agenda. Just saying, I love you. Without you, I'm only partial. So many times, so-

called lovers relate to each other in terms of personal satisfaction and not in terms of the giving of wholesome strength to each other. Parents who hold each other have children who know how to give support to their companions. It's important that we learn to hold and hold tightly.

I maintain that this is natural. It is not only natural, but it is divine. For I ask you the question, how do you embrace God? How do you allow for His embrace of you? I realize it's an awesome thought. Maybe even a frightful relationship to think, that God could actually reach out and surround you with his arms and that you would presume to reach out and touch or embrace him. In other religions, particularly in some aspects of Old Testament imagery and some parts of the New Testament, the gods are painted as awesome, as almost demonic, as having a thousand arms, not to embrace you, but to afflict you, like an octopus watching over every movement.

Jesus taught that God was a father. A good being as near as the air we breathe. Not the air we breathe, but as near as the air we breathe. If we think in terms of a father, who's a holding father, who embraces tightly, or a mother, who cuddles and nurses, what a different picture we have of God. Persons of faith have some hymns about the strong arms of God, such as His everlasting arms, in his arms he'll take and shield you, leaning on Jesus safe and secure from all alarm.

The writers of scripture speak in terms, not in a holding action to maintain the status quo, but a securing action. An action which enhances. In Psalms 119, there are verses which read, "Uphold me according to Your word, that I might live and let me not be ashamed of my hope. Hold me up and I shall be safe." Psalm 139, that Psalm when one tries to get away from God. "Wither shall I flee? In the uttermost parts of the sea, thy right hand shall hold me." Isaiah tells that there are none that will be able to stir themselves to take hold of God. And Hosea preached to his people the word of God, to "hold fast to love and justice. Paul to the Philippians wrote I hold you in my heart. How I long after you all."

He also wrote to the Thessalonians, "hold fast to that which is good. Abstain from every form of evil." And Jesus in a late word in Revelations speaks to the church saying "I come quickly. Hold fast that which you have, let no one take your crown."

So you see in the very depths of our religious expression, there is attachment, there is relationship, there is holding, between us and God. There's no way that we could be separate and indifferent and turn God off or on, or ourselves off or on. For it is an intimate, close relationship. A relationship which carries over into human relationships.

In our religious commitment, there is no room for a casual relationship to God or each other, no tentativeness. Religious commitment demands that we hold and hold tightly. We say to God, hold me, hold me tight. God responds by saying to us, hold tightly to me. Do not be diverted. We go through life together, God says. We hold deep and abiding convictions about all of this. No shilly shallying, no machine washing. Jesus taught that God was a Father, who would be nearer than the air we breathe, but that means that we must stay close to God and receive His support.

It means also that as God-relaters, we testify about that relationship. We speak up. No false fronts, no self righteousness that silences enlightenment. We speak up and announce to the world our love affair with God. We have the inner resources to run the risk of involvement with the needs of others, when we have this kind of relationship with God. We practice our faith in our homes by giving and receiving strength from each other.

The writer of Hebrews wrote, "having a great high priest, who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession, for we have not a high priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but one that has been in all points tempted like we are, yet without sin. Let us draw near with boldness, unto the throne of Grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in time of need.

Hold me. Hold me tightly, Oh God of Heavens.

Be My Valentine
Feb. 12, 1989
Runnels Christian Church

Scripture: I John 4:7-21

Intro: On Tuesday night next, some of us will wake up and realize that we forgot it was Valentines Day. Worse yet some of us will not even remember it at all. I had such a problem and I answered it and also my Scottish instinct by suggesting to my wife that she give back the valentine that I had given her and I would then have it on hand the next year and would simply add the date and give it to her again.

I can remember when I was young I would ask my mother for some money to buy some penny valentines and would proceed to address them to all sorts of young ladies hoping that they would turn their attention in my

direction. Some of the valentines I was even too timid to sign. We used to make them out of colored paper and doilies, folding little paper springs to give a two layered effect.

Valentines Day is really about love. But love is such a complex subject. Love is supposed to lead us to the altar, but then after marriage so often things seems to be different. A fellow recalled his wedding day saying he would never forget it. When the time came, I couldn't find the ring. Boy! did I get an awful fright. Yes, said his friend, I know, and you've still got her. Two friendly taxi drivers stopped at a stop light. "How's your old jalopy," yelled the first one. "Oh my wife's fine. How's yours?" said the other. We joke about love and our relations to each other, but when we are serious and get down to discussing what love is, it proves to be a complex subject. In fact the work has been preempted by song writers and currently given such connotation as to be almost useless.

I. Modern Love

The modern day lives on love as eros. The epitome of love is constant sexual tantalization and when that becomes boring sadism and torture are mixed in. The songs build up an exotic beat and that with the noise drives all other sense away. When it is all mixed in with prancing and dancing plus drugs the mind is blown and the end is destruction, which is the opposite of love. Love in its true sense is the beginning of creative relationships, not destruction. As persons of caring and concern we need to resist the defamation of the word, love. Love needs to be restored to its rightful place as the catalytic that makes life possible.

Many feel that love is a commodity that can be purchased. With fame or wealth some would build a camp following of loyal followers. How quickly people abandon their idols when fame and wealth slip away. How often such persons turn to alcohol and drugs to try to drown their loneliness.

II What is True Love

Love involves such factors as loyalty, devotion, and mutuality much more than sexuality. A rightly ordered human relationship is one of mutuality in love. Community and society is built upon love of neighbor and the definition of neighbor is not limited by geography, or race, or economic level, or any thing that would cause separation between persons, peoples or nations. Real love among human beings is built on a sacred covenant of mutuality. Otherwise when that covenant is broken then comes trouble, wars, pestilence, poverty, exploitation, hatred and all that makes for human misery. We know this to be true but why do we fail to love?

In the old McGuffey Reader there was a verse which read, "In Adam's fall, we sinned all." It seems to be our nature to fall short of what we know we ought to do. In the Garden of Eden we evidently choose to reject living in tune with creation. We really can't blame Adam and Eve, for each of us have the same choice and some how we tend to blow it. Humanity seems bent on

disobedience to fundamental laws of nature. Today we are reaching the ultimate in the abuse of each other, our environment. Even now our waters are a hazard and safety in dwelling among our fellows becomes a question. What can be wrong with us. Maybe we still don't know what true love is. Maybe human love even when seen as a covenant of mutuality is not enough. If love is not to be found in possessing the object of love, if love is not in serving and idolizing the object of love, if love is not even in reciprocity and mutually of relationships, what is love?

The Source of Love

Love took on real meaning a couple thousand years ago in the life and teachings of one who sought to direct the attention of his contemporaries to the real nature of God. God found out what humanity was really like.. They were like spoiled children who take and take and sulk for more. I suppose God could have concluded I'll just wipe this mess out and start all over again but he in real love decided to teach the way to true love. God's way, the way of Grace. This is not mutuality. It is not will you be my Valentine, rather let me be your Valentine. . That is what God was saying as he sent his message through Jesus. Jesus by his own response to God's love demonstrated the fulfilled life. He taught that in responding to God's love brings a quality in living that results in ethical and responsible behavior. We love because God first loved us. Love of neighbor comes because we have first responded to God's love. Our worship of God in the genuine sense is our response to the love of God for us. Those who truly respond to God's love are those who keep his commandments. This involves heart and soul and mind, the total self. Jesus understood this when in the Garden of Gethsemane he said to God not my will but thine be done.

In Christ Love has reached down from God to take on a new and more significant meaning. A meaning of permanence which even the psalmist anticipated when he said "for his steadfast love endures forever". The ultimate in love is the giving of life for the sake of extending life for others. Greater love has no one then to give his life for another. Love is a relationship that is willing to lose oneself in order to find oneself living in another.

Love is not eros, its is agape. It is that which we celebrate at the communion table when Jesus reminds us of his teaching that God says "Let me be your valentine". Take my yoke upon you and learn of my ways of love and be a blessing to your fellows. The church, then, is the fellowship of love. It is the gathering of the loved and the loving. God loves us and so we in turn love others. This is not unnatural, but the most natural of relationships, for it brings about creativity, peace, harmony and true reciprocity and mutuality. We seem not to be able to do it by our own initiative. It takes God's initiative and then his power and strength in us to enable us to truly love in spite of ourselves. Remember that God keeps loving us even though we do not deserve to be loved and so we in turn must find strength in God's love of us to keep loving in situations that seem to us not to deserve our love.

ECHOES FROM THE PAST

Altoona Christian Church

August 21, 1994

Scripture II Kings 23:1-3

I. Introduction: Sisters and Brothers in Christ welcome to the house of the Lord. So you would have been greeted in 1910 the year your corner stone was laid. You would also not have greeted your minister as Reverend but as Brother or as Elder. In fact I was a grown man before it became the custom to put the title, Reverend, before the ministers name. The minister was one of the "boys" or one of the "girls" because women were also ministers from very early in our movement. My own mother was ordained.

A. In 1910 I would probably have had my face covered with a beard or at least a mustache, but try as I might I would not have been able to cover my highest point with a full head of hair. However, such as I was able to grow might well reach to my shoulders.

B. As I thought about the event which will happen this noon in the examining of the contents of the cornerstone I was reminded of a similar event several centuries ago in the history of Judah. It seemed to me there might be some lessons to be learned from recalling this experience in ancient Palestine.

II. During the reign of Josiah (640-609 B.C.) more than 2600 years ago, in the land of Judah religious affairs having been neglected during the reigns of his predecessors Josiah decided to rebuild and repair the buildings and facilities used for worship. During the process some workers ran into a document which could have been in a cornerstone or a safekeeping place. It was a document which described the standards of morality and behavior for the people and the procedures of worship as practiced in the past when all were obedient followers of the true God of Israel. This document was brought to the king. When Josiah read it he was filled with dismay and alarm for he realized that under his predecessors the worship of God had been replaced by the worship of foreign gods, and religious practices and moral standards had deviated from the high standards of the past.

A. What were the religious conditions during the reigns of Josiah's predecessors? Altars had been built to many different gods on the high hills all through the country and great revels were held in those places with much drunkenness and debauchery. The sacrifice of children was practiced. Even one of the Kings sacrificed two of his own children. The temple in Jerusalem was used as a place to worship idols, and practices not appropriate to the

worship of God were indulged. The king along with his people practiced soothsaying, augury and sorcery and dealt with mediums and wizards. The king with the people of Israel focused on their own selfish concerns and neglected acts of charity and the proper care of each other, seeking to exploit the weaknesses of the weak for personal gain and did evil in the sight of God, offending Him mightily.

B. Now Josiah when he found out how far things had gone and the possible consequences of such neglect of the temple and worship services and realized how low the standards of morality had become set about to repair the temple and the other religious facilities. He also summoned all the elders of the tribes and through them led a reform throughout the land of Israel. The norms of the ancient past were far more appropriate for the present than the innovations of Josiah's predecessors. There were certain standards of conduct which were fundamental to the health of the nation which could never be outdated and should never be superseded.

Today we will open the box from the cornerstone from the old church building. In it will be documents from the past. What will they tell us about the past and what our forefathers held were the standards of behavior and the concerns of that time? What were the religious emphases and foci of the period when that corner stone was laid?

II. We do not as yet know what is in the box placed in the cornerstone in 1910, but we do know much about the Brotherhood of Christians or Disciples of Christ as they were known. 1910 was also the year when our movement celebrated its hundredth anniversary. It was a hundred years since the signing of the "Declaration and Address" by Thomas Campbell which along with other events and personalities led to the founding of the movement emphasizing a return to the New Testament as the norm for the unity of the divided state of Christianity. A Centennial Convention was held in Pittsburgh when over 30,000 people attended the closing communion service and up to 50,000 were in attendance at the various sessions. This movement in its one hundred years had established 11,714 churches with 1,327,559 members and 6,861 ministers plus many lay preachers. There were 8,752 Bible Schools with 984,883 students enrolled. There were thousands of Christian Women's Missionary Circles and Ladies Aid Societies in the churches across the land which did many works of charity and raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for missionary efforts around the world. It had an active youth program called Christian Endeavor which served tens of thousands of its youth as well as other youth who came to its Bible study meetings on Sunday evenings before the evening church service. That was the day when all of Sunday was devoted to the church and religious affairs. Any extra hours were used to deepen family ties.

A. The individual churches cooperated to send missionaries to spread the gospel in Africa, Australia, Canada, China, England, India, Japan, Mexico, the Philippines, Porto Rico and many other countries. They had established a Benevolent Association, a Board of Ministerial Relief, a Temperance Board, a Board of Church Extension, and many institutions of higher education. Religious periodicals and presses served the needs of the Brotherhood. One could spend an entire day telling of the work of the Disciples of Christ at that time, but I would like to direct our attention to some of the basic beliefs held at that time. Also I would like each of you to note within yourself if these are your beliefs now or whether you are aware of these beliefs as a part of the congregation of which you are a member.

B. . The Disciple movement was based on the dignity of each individual who should be granted liberty of thought, liberty of speech and the right of individual interpretation of the Scripture. The power to fully express that liberty came with education in the teachings of the Bible, particularly the New Testament and even more particularly the teachings of Jesus. There was no place for clerical or priestly authoritarianism or religious despotism. There were also no human standards to be imposed as tests of orthodoxy, such as creeds or catechisms to be learned summarizing the official beliefs. The one basic test was the confession of Peter when Jesus asked him, "Who do men say that I am." Peter's answer was that Jesus was the Son of God. Thus the only confession an individual need make in order to identify himself as a follower of Christ was to declare that he believed that Jesus was the Son of God and his Savior. In order for persons to pledge allegiance to Christ and follow his teachings they would need to read the Bible, be taught through preaching, Bible classes, and discussions with other Christians. There were no tests of faith involving such doctrines as the trinity, the virgin birth, apostolic succession, depravity, original sin, or atonement. Each one was to have freedom of interpretation and understanding in those areas. Such understandings as one possessed were not to be made tests of fellowship with other Christians.

C. It was also a movement which desired to bring about the unity of a divided Christianity, particularly as seen in the many sects and faiths on the frontier brought over from Europe. This unity would have only the confession of faith in Jesus as the Christ, and the conduct of church life and government should be similar to the time of the New Testament. It was understood that they gathered on the first day of the week for instruction, worship and the breaking of bread, or observance of the Lord's supper. Membership in the various groups which were independent congregations or gatherings of people was through immersion baptism of persons of the age of accountability upon confession of faith in Jesus Christ. Thus the Disciples of Christ did not lift up

doctrines, creeds and opinions of theologians as tests of faith. The goal was the emancipation of the individual Christian from ecclesiastical control and the breakdown of sectarianism within Protestantism.

D. One through hearing the Gospel preached, through study of the Bible, through discussion with Christian friends could come to understand and accept the Lordship of Christ and through baptism receive remission of ones sins or an opportunity to start anew. The faith of the Disciples was not based on a required mystical experience nor was conversion confirmed by an emotional ordeal and public confession of the depths of ones pre-Christian life. Visions, dreams, voices were not invoked to give authority to ones testimony or preaching. Rather a use of ones God given rational abilities to appreciate the reasonableness of Christ's teachings and requirements for the conduct of ones life in this world was all that was necessary. The Holy Spirit of God was there to give strength and guidance and enabled one to harvest the fruits of the Spirit which are the marks of salvation. Central to the worship service was the at least weekly observance of the Lord's Supper presided over by the laity of the church. At this time the Presence of the living Christ was especially felt as they remembered His life and teachings and His saving love in His sacrifice for them.

E. The Bible was the main source for the understanding of the life and work of those who knew and followed Jesus. Jesus, a product of the Jewish faith system based on the Pentateuch or the first five books of the Old Testament, as the followers of Christ came to call it, gave His disciples an understanding of God as their loving Father which to Jesus' followers improved on their understanding of the God of Israel. Thus our early leaders came to understand that the knowledge of God's will came in dispensations throughout the period of the Old Testament and became fulfilled by Jesus' understanding of God as Father. At the same time it was held that God through His guiding Spirit still speaks to those who will listen and do His will in whatever age they live. This means for Christians in any age that stewardship is not stagnant after baptism but a continuous and diligent posture of receptivity to God's will for their particular life in their particular time and circumstance.

F. One can get a general understanding for the concerns of this movement by noting the subjects of the sermons preached around 1910. There were many sermons on the meaning of the death and resurrection of Jesus, sermons on the New Testament church, and the work and role of the Holy Spirit. They preached on the necessity to be evangelistic which included special preaching meetings of one to two week duration with services every night in the church. Visiting evangelists would preach for the conversion of sinners. Telling the Good News to others included missions at home and far

away places. They preached on the true dignity of man and his body as the temple of God which resulted in sermons against profanity, the saloon, gambling and immoral affairs. The Christian home and family life were held up as the spiritual womb for the proper rearing of children. They had sermons on the conduct of personal affairs including hard work, finances, and integrity in all relationships. Growth in spiritual life and heavenly rewards after this life for the faithful were the focus of many sermons. Christian citizenship including voting for Christian office holders drew attention from the pulpit as well as choosing a vocation of service such as teaching, nursing and especially the ministry.

III. We could spend some time analyzing the condition of the Disciples of Christ today and the conditions of present day congregations, but I think it is more important for us at this time of remembrance with the opening of the cornerstone and reading its contents from your loved ones some of whom are still with us, who labored so hard to pass on to you the Christian faith and a place to worship-it is more important I say-to give thanks to God who through the efforts of those who have gone before making possible the good news of salvation for you.

It is more important for you to use this occasion to take an inventory of the contents of your own faith. How closely do you yield to God's will for your life? How closely do you follow Jesus' teachings? How well informed are you of these teachings and do you continually study the Bible to know more about His teachings. How much time do you give to prayer or do you even pray, giving thanks, and asking for help and guidance in your life and your relationships with others. Are you evangelistic on behalf of Christ and your church, that is, do you speak to others inviting them to come to church with you and do you share with them what Christ means in your life. Or is your religion simply attending weddings, funerals, the performance of grandchildren in events in the church and perhaps attendance at dinners and money raising affairs in the church. Really, no matter how devoted you are, now is the time to be candid and ask yourself what am I going to answer the Lord when he asks me, "Now tell me, what have you been doing on my behalf when you were alive on earth?"

Have you been putting off thinking about eternity just as one is tempted when in school to put off studies until the last minute? But, one knows the last minute for the school term. How many of us have gone to the teacher and asked for an incomplete to be made up in the next term. In life, however, you do not know the day nor the hour when the term of life will end and there will be no succeeding terms for which an incomplete may be granted. How wonderful it will be for you if because of your diligence and God's love and grace you can hear the words, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant."

Small Children-Big Children
 Altoona Christian Church
 September 11, 1994

Scripture Mt. 18:2-6

I. Introduction: Today we begin the fall season of Sunday School. This is not business as usual, for the Sunday School is needed as much today as ever before in the history of our nation. If we complain about the functional and literal illiteracy of too many of our youth, we could also well admit the religious illiteracy of many of the children of even so called church members. Our youth are not well equipped to face the present day of hyper stimulation of sensual drives let alone the witness they should be bearing for the Christian way as the way of peace and brotherhood as well as the way leading to eternal life. They are the ones to succeed in the leadership of our nation and hopefully along with the devoutly religious of other nations the leadership of the world. If we as adults work hard at the teaching mission of the Church maybe we yet have time to leaven our nations life.

Not all of the youth are filled with evil and beyond redemption. Most are just ignorant of the teachings of Christianity. Even the more privileged are ignorant. In one of my college classes there was student who asked the meaning of the word, Eucharist. Thinking that this was a more liturgical term that most lay persons would not know I assumed by mentioning another term like communion or Lord's Supper he would understand. This young man was from a good family who were members of a leading Protestant church. He had attended Sunday School some but I soon discovered that he did not know what communion was nor the Lord's Supper. I finally had to tell him the story of Jesus' life including his last meal with his followers before his death in order for him to have context in which to understand the place of Eucharist in the Christian religion. Our young people and many of the older generation are not well armed to face the hostile environment of the present day. The church as a teaching institution is not fulfilling its primary mission. It is so caught up in giving first aid to individuals who are victimized by the present society, doing baby sitting of young and old and keeping its institutions running that its main mission for teaching is being pre-empted. We can't even mount a good offensive these days. We are simply caring for our wounded and not even able to adequately guard our rear as we retreat from evangelizing the people of this generation. We have given up preparing our young to carry on the battle against the forces of evil in our society.

A. Jesus lived in such an age and he spent most of his short ministry teaching rather than preaching. He prepared a core of followers to pass on his teachings. He taught his disciples that the world was out of "sync" filled

with out of "sync" persons. It is not incidental that the frame of reference, for Jesus' teaching approach was the open, receptive mind of small children. They are the ones who most freely accept the teaching of righteousness and the Kingdom of God. It was also the frame of reference for the adult. They should become like children even if they were big children. They should open their minds and keep them open to the revelations that God through the Holy Spirit will continue to give them throughout their lives. The Holy Spirit may give guidance in areas of difficult decisions or discipline for failing to live up to that which is already known. However the so called mature or closed mind of the adult sets a trap of conceit which with the loss of humility causes us flounder in our own conceits. That is the reason that Sunday School is not just for children but also for all Christians who would follow Paul's admonition to Timothy when he wrote to him to study to show yourself approved unto God, rightly divining the word of truth.

B. We all are aware of the so called crisis in Public Education. The breakdown of homes, neighborhoods and the failure of churches has dumped on to the schools an incorrigible mass, where just maintaining order and physical safety takes up most of the energy of the teachers. The Public Schools have also because of bickering and litigation by the citizens been emasculated from teaching morality and in their desperate plight some even advocate practices which in the name of practicality support immorality. But the failure of the Public Schools began with the failure of the Sunday School to do vital teaching with their youth. If all of the churches and synagogues in the United States had been and were doing a vital job teaching religious values to the children of their members there would be a much more significant leaven in our Public Schools today. Now one wonders whether it is wise to send ones children into schools where order and morality are not maintained. The hope for all of our society is in taking seriously our opportunity with our own children and any others we can enlist to enroll in our Sunday School.

C. The teachers who have been set aside to staff the Altoona Christian Church Sunday School are in the very front lines of the war against evil and they must be supported by the whole congregation with encouragement and help and particularly by bringing your children regularly and participating yourself. Also since Sunday School is only one short hour once a week which must compete with many hours before the destruction machine, the boob tube or the devil's workshop, more familiarly known as TV., it is important the home emulate Christian virtues. The one hour in Sunday School should be followed up with many more hours of Christian example and teaching through the week in the home. In the home should be the reading and the study of the Bible with memorization of key passages, the practice of the fine art of prayer which means learning how to be in tune with God. Concepts can be taught in Sunday School but the practice of these truths must take place at home or

else "Jesus loves me this I know" is not real when there is not love between father and mother, brother and sister. Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vane is not real when profanity is voiced at home. The Sunday School for the Christian family is but the beginning of the teaching that must also take place at home.

II. The Curriculum: What should be taught in the modern Sunday School? The most modern teaching would still be that which has always equipped the saints in the past. We should enable each generation to appropriate the Scriptures for itself. This means teaching a curriculum centered on the Bible not just about the Bible but the very contents of the Bible with special emphasis on the New Testament and with special focus on the teachings of Jesus. The Bible must become not a book of magic which only special theologians can unravel. It must remain the people's book.

A. This means that each generation must be induced to read in the Bible and hear the message of God spoken directly to them. Sunday Schools should make certain that everyone of its pupils can read the Bible both silently and out loud. In addition pupils should be led to memorize key passages and become thoroughly familiar with great sections such as the Sermon on the Mount, the Love chapter, the parables, certain psalms and many other passages which have proven invaluable to many in the past in facing life with all of its complexities.

B In addition there are basic doctrines of the Christian church, Disciples of Christ, which are revealed in a study of its history. These are important guidelines for the very vitality of any congregation and give meaning to the gathering of the faithful each Sunday morning for worship of God, the Father. Such study also keeps a congregation from falling for dogmatists, who come from other traditions which do not respect the rights of individual interpretation of Scripture and want to fasten on creedal statements in place of the simple but profound confession of Jesus as Son of God and Savior before one can be called a Christian.

C. Not only does constant study of the core of one's faith enable one to spot points of view that distract and destroy true brotherhood but also youth who are trained in their faith and have accepted responsibility for thinking religious concerns through will be, as it were vaccinated, against the appeal of cults both religious and secular. They will be better able to resist the siren call of leaders that are the center of new fangle movements put forth in the name and with the dynamics of a religion. An empty house or an empty mind becomes the abode of even worse demons.

D. A Sunday School staff should know its pupils so well that if any have deficiencies in basic skills the experience in Sunday School and in their homes can supplement the work of the public schools. Reading, writing and the ability to communicate ones thoughts should all be enhanced by the experience children have under the tutelage of the Church. These are the future ambassadors for Christ and unless we train them to do a better job than we have done the message of Jesus' love and salvation will not be heard by the many thousands being born even on this Sunday. Here is where retired folks can supplement the efforts of the Sunday School teachers by taking on the tutoring of a student who needs extra help. When Robert Raikes, two centuries ago in England, popularized the Sunday School which also included Saturday in many instances he took inner city youth and taught them both secular subjects and religious subjects. Today this is still the task to develop a critical mass of young people to lead out in the future for the Christian way of life.

E. The work of the Sunday school should result in persons who are able to discriminate, that is make proper judgments with the proper standards and foundation by which to make such judgments. It also should bring up a generation which is able to make and keep good and proper commitments including such as marriage as well as vocation.

IV. Conclusion: Why are children when they are born as babies so cute and lovable? What happens to them that makes them so especially difficult by the time they come to adolescence? Even when very young they catch on and they have the gall to say "but daddy you do it." I wonder if it is that they as they grow up are in the company of adults and increasingly become like them. Jesus was very specific when he said that the little ones or the small ones have the capacity for salvation because of their teach ability. He was stern when he said "woe to the adult who causes them to stumble." He meant not just overt action against the little ones but acts of neglect, and indifference. "Its none of my business or I can do what I want to do, let them look out for themselves" is too often our reply. Jesus said in effect it would be better that such a person with such an attitude toward the small ones should have the equivalent of several cement blocks tied around their neck and that person be cast to their drowning death in the middle of the sea than that such a person should cause a child to stumble. This open, imitating mind of the child must be fed with only the best but it is certainly being besieged by tons of trash today and much of it in the name of the first amendment and individual liberty. Because of this children are being caused to stumble.

A. Jesus also said that the open mind of the child is also the mind that adults, or the big children, must cultivate in order to be humble enough to keep hearing the word of God speaking to their souls. Christian growth for the

adult is based on a modesty and humbleness before God so that God's Holy Spirit may dwell within and open ones eyes so that one may see the visions of love God has for us. Such enhancement gives one power to persevere, make right choices, endure disappointment and even handle success.

Jesus message was that the Kingdom of God was at hand.. That is true today if we will only seize the opportunity to declare it in the way we conduct our business in the church and particularly through the Sunday School. May God grant wisdom and patience to our teachers as they conduct the very important work of God through the Sunday School

The Mindset of a Christian
 Capitol Hill Christian Church
 September 21, 1997

Scripture: Philippians 4:5-9

Intro: Many times over the years I have filled the pulpit of this church, twice for an extended period of time. I feel, almost, that I am a permanent member of your staff, and that each return is a sort of homecoming. Each time I have returned there are many more new faces and fewer familiar faces. How many of you will confess that you are 80 or older. Well, what do you know, it seems the women are getting sweeter and the men are getting uglier. When I say to my wife, "you are really beautiful." She replies, "Honey, you don't have your glasses on." It may be true that sight dims over the years but time does deepen fondness in a happy relationship.

When I was in Park Avenue elementary school at the end of the day we would put on our overshoes, coats, scarfs, hats and mittens, then line up two by two and hold our column at the door of our classroom. All the rooms looked out on an inner court which reached two stories. J. O. Mitchell, the large, imposing and no-nonsense principal would call for our attention, call on Miss Gabrielson to give the pitch and we would sing a song. The words of which are as follows:

When you come to the end of a perfect day,
 And you sit all alone with your thought,
 While the chimes rang out with the carol gay,
 For the joy that the day has brought,
 Do you think what the end of a perfect day
 Can mean to a tired heart,
 When the sun goes down with a flaming ray
 And the dear friends have to part.

There was a second verse which ended like this-
 And we find at the end of a perfect day
 The soul of a friend we've made.

After the song the class that was best behaved was chosen by the principal to lead out the rest of the school. We exited still in columns to the front sidewalk where we divided, some going north and some going south. All were all the time under the watchful eye of student monitors positioned along the bank overlooking the front side walk. Any overt action such as slugging or shoving another, or yielding to the temptation to grab a handful of snow and make a snowball to pitch at an unsuspecting target could get one sent back to J. O. Mitchell's, office which meant a lecture on deportment and for chronic misbehavior sometimes the lesson would be reinforced with a yard stick across the rear extremities. Most passed beyond the gaze of the monitors quite safely and continued on home. There were no buses in those days to take us to and from school. For some it was a walk of some length, entered into with purpose and gusto. For there were folks at home who expected us to arrive at a certain time after school closing and any delay in arrival would bring the inquiry, "What took you so long?"

That was a part of the forming of my mind-set.

Mind-set means the direction of one's thinking. It is not my intention to dwell on the total mindset of an individual today but rather to think of the religious mind-set, particularly of a Christian.

It is true that the mindset today comes from the family, the clan, the community which is much larger today, the school and most importantly the media which includes all the offerings of television and computer as they are manipulated by those with special interests and products and schemes to sell. My stomach at times really sets my mind. As certain times particularly just now as I realize as soon as this preacher gets through with his sermon it will be getting closer to dinner time. and visions of banana cream pie, pumpkin pie or pecan pie, mincemeat pie, or banana splits, a hot fudge sundae or a box of chocolates, also of country fried chicken, mashed potatoes and gravy, fresh green beans, and if I keep this up I'll never get to the sermon or else I will lose my audience you will all drift off in slumber dreaming about food. A candid discussion of any part of the above would take us weeks, but let us think for a while of that of which our religious mind-set is composed.

Many Christians, Jews and Muslims have the religious mind set by beliefs that they hold about the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Unfortunately, they have not advanced beyond such conceptions. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob believed in a God who was a narrow tribal God, who was related to a particular people in a particular country. This God commanded them to slash

and burn their enemies. He would wreak horrible vengeance on them if they did not obey him. They believed that this God was a giant of a man who gave special favors to his devotees and those who followed strictly the doctrines which his special teachers and priests held to be true.

The prophets of Israel tried to give a more ethical and moral understanding of God. Jesus added to this emphasis and tried to universalize God. Mohammed tried to teach the concept of one universal God. Paul tried to lift God beyond the bloody animal sacrifices, and many others have tried to keep their contemporaries from creating a God in their own human image.

Others understood that God is a spirit who is greater than all that humanity can conceive. God is love in such a broad sense that humanity will always be striving to understand and practice the scope of that love.

Unfortunately for humanity most of us in this world dwell in two realms: one the secular in which we are driven by our appetites and the desire to acquire fame and fortune. The other is the sacred and yet much of this realm is still dominated by narrow understandings of God. Understandings which still carry much of the baggage of God as tribal,, territorial and self-righteously vengeful.

How are we going to sort out the essential in our religious mindset. How may we share in God's intent and desire for the fulfilling of his creation. First, we must acknowledge that God does not do the bidding of humans. God is not a politician who can be bought, bribed and flattered. On the other hand God is one who instructs those who listen. In the annals of the human experience of God is much that can be studied. However, it must be studied carefully to sort out the gems of advice that have been proven by generations of human experience. From these annals all tribal, nationalistic, clannish, ethnic, particularistic and self-interest concepts must be sifted out.

The goal of such study by human beings is to learn how to become holy and wise and loving and serving. Otherwise, becoming one with God and purpose and desire. Various disciplines have been advocated and followed, some with such fanaticism as to be counterproductive and even destructive. Some have attempted to withdraw from the world even to the point of ending earthly life. But the real test is whether one can be in the world but not of it, that is, to accept the reality of life but also accept the challenge to enhance the quality life for all within one's realistic reach, -beginning at home and then in the community, at work and wider. in this day of worldwide communication who who knows what act or word of creative response may have echoes of universal scope.

Paul, the apostle, gives a good formula for developing a proper Christian mindset when he writes to the church at Philippi, some of whose members were not acting as they should. He said, in effect, that a proper mind is developed by proper thought. We read his advice in the Scripture lesson but I repeat again, a proper mind is developed by proper thought.

His advice is given in Philippians chapter four, verse eight: " Finally, brethren whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things."

True, honorable, just, pure, lovely and gracious are the keywords. To develop the meaning of each one, by itself would not be just another sermon but at least a whole book. One could well question whether such terms have any meaning in today's world. How many have been the beneficiaries of relationships with Christians which have presented a way of life or mindset described by such terms. Does the route to success have traveling it persons who can be characterized by such terms. Can you think of someone that you feel really could be characterized as being true, honorable, just, pure, lovely and gracious? Is that person still alive, and perhaps dead and one you have begun to idealize. Ah! Maybe I am being too cynical which is not a virtue listed by Paul.

Actually we all at various times show forth one or more of these virtues. But the difficulty is putting them all together into a total mindset. The difficulty is finding sufficient illustrations of these virtues on which to think so one can develop such a mindset or habit of character. It's the question of the hen and the egg. Which comes first? If one cannot find evidence of these virtues on which to think one becomes frustrated in developing such a mindset.

The challenge is to practice the virtues in our daily life as much as possible so we will give to others examples on which they can think and thus begin to develop such a mindset. One must ask of oneself does each action, decision, statement, or relationship express behavior that can be described by one or more of these virtues.

The alternative is to be suspicious, fearful, pessimistic, indecisive, uncommitted which can mature into one who at times can be hard, mean, deceitful, two-faced, and ill tempered. Such a person is very susceptible to addictions which it make even more difficult in realizing a Christian mindset

According to Paul for what purpose is all of this noble thought? What is the end result? What is the goal? If one will do what he admonishes he says, "the God of peace will be with you." What does that mean? It means that one will

find confidence, assurance, fulfillment, strength, conviction, courage, power, or an underlying faith for one's daily living.

Do not let past concepts of God dominate your mindset. Do not leave your mind to be filled with every notion that is brought to you by the media. Do not fantasize what life would be like if you were only someone else. Instead think on that which is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely and gracious and you will come to know the true God, the God of peace, reconciliation, healing and regeneration.

There is a hymn that we used to sing in Christian Endeavor, the youth movement of yesterday, which went something like this.

I would be true for there are those who trust me;
I would be pure for there are those who care.
I would be strong for there is much to suffer;
I would be brave for there is much to dare.

I would be friend of all the foe, the friendless;
I would be giving and forget the gift.
I would be humble for I know my weakness;
I would look up and laugh and love and lift.

I would be learning day by day the lessons,
My heavenly Father gives me in His word.
I would be quick to hear his slightest whisper,
And prompt and glad to do the things I've heard.

I would be prayerful through each busy moment;
I would be constantly in touch with God.
I would be to tuned to hear his slightest whisper;
I would have faith to keep the path Christ trod.

These words, it seems to me, sum the mindset of an authentic Christian. Will you try to be one remembering that Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God."

What We Do and Say
 Sermon May 7, 1995,
 Park Avenue Christian Church

Scripture Mt. 12:30-37

Life in our country in recent times culminating in the destruction of life in Oklahoma City is enough to bring ultimate despair to those who have lived long enough to remember a time when the standard of behavior was better defined, more respected and guided by teachings based on a generally supported Christian ethic. As I think on my life in this community as a boy and the fact that my parents' guidance was reinforced by this church, the school and the public behavior of most men and women including the media of that day, I wonder where any person living today can turn to be reinforced in living a life of quality flavored by the milk of human kindness.

This is an age that is falling under judgment. It is the judgment not of an outside force or extra terrestrial beings or even God himself. It is a judgment as effective as gravity and which is in the very essence of nature. It is a judgment which we in this agricultural state and in this time of year should know and understand. It is, "What so ever you sow, that shall you reap."

This morning there is not enough time to tell you of all that is on my heart, so I have picked out three themes on which I wish to elaborate. They are blasphemy, vengeance and guidance. Any one of which could be a week of speaking, but let me present some preliminary thinking and you fill in the rest as you contemplate these ideas in relationship to you own way of living today.

Blasphemy is a word strange to the ears of today, but that is because blaspheming is so common that we no longer distinguish it from the ordinary discourse of today. It used to be, that to blaspheme, was to speak or write despairingly about God or things sacred. It also can be the actions on the part of a person or persons assuming and using irreverently the prerogatives of God. In effect any one who at any time presumes to act as God can be involved in blasphemy. The one unforgivable sin was blasphemy against he Holy Spirit. Such was in essence speaking and teaching as though light was dark, sin was good and goodness was the work of the devil. To be against the Holy Spirit, or the healing light of goodness in the world, is to be a person or group who stubbornly pursues destruction of all that is good and has no regard for all that holds family, neighborhood, and community together. It is to operate from a posture that others are for exploitation or even obliteration if they get in ones way.

The work of the group that destroyed the people of Oklahoma City was blasphemy. They presumed in their stubborn, narrow minded way to bypass God and bring cruel death and injury to innocent people. They presumed to be prosecuting attorney, judge , jury and executioner. Not even innocent children were allowed a defense. The children were guilty by being in a

government building. The bombers particularly blasphemed God, for they made a caricature of the Being whose place they usurped. For God himself is full of grace and forgiveness. Is that not the story of Easter.

But you see the ultimate blasphemy is war. War is not just hell. It is the total assumption of the prerogatives of God. Modern war is particularly so, in that modern weapons destroy all life not just the combatants. What happened to the belief that old people, women and children were to be spared? What happened to the idea that war was between armies of men facing each other. Today from land, sky and ocean comes death or its potential without regard for anything living; for that matter, without regard for the face of the earth as it becomes pock marked by the scars of the total devastation and pollution of modern war. Even the blood of the dying does not fertilize poppy fields for the soil has been sterilized by radiation and chemicals.

But wait a minute such talk is too easy. The ultimate blasphemy is possible because of our own daily blasphemies. By our language we no longer show respect for God. Profanity fills our speaking, the media, particularly television and even our school yards. Our bodies, we were taught, were the temples of God. Yet we profane them by drugs which include tobacco, alcohol and even caffeine. We teach that what was wrong is right, that gambling is good. Through appealing to human weakness to sin we will support good, such as schools.. If we have to support our school system through the exploitation of human weakness to gamble than such school systems are not worth saving.

Closely related to gambling is the temptation offered by credit cards. How many families spend more than they earn seeking to supply instant gratification, and yielding to the appeal of all the special days; Christmas, Valentine's Day, Easter, Mother's Day, Fathers Day, Fourth of July, Vacation, Halloween, Thanksgiving and on and on. The bills come due, the interest piles up and we think we can act like our government and charge it to the deficit. From this condition comes quarreling, blaming and even abuse aggravated by smoking more, drinking more including more caffeine.

We have also lost the sense of honest measure. Just the other day the sign said, "sugar" for what seemed to be a reasonable price but then on closer examination it was not the standard five pounds it was for four pounds and constituted an actual raise in price per pound. Our packaging and pricing is blasphemy. We were taught to let ones yea be yea and ones nay be nay. Now we also have become a litigious age where those who have the means can buy defense and others even the innocent can be impoverished trying to extricate themselves from the web of legal entanglement.

We need to look into the mirror of our own lives to see where we are blaspheming for blasphemy can also result from sins of omission. Are we holding our elected officials to the standards we support? Are we voting? Are we writing letters encouraging leaders to take stands upholding the financial, social and personal morality that we support? Or are we using them for

special favors on our own behalf? Do we allow the first amendment to be used to allow not just political views to be expressed but also the language of violence, pornography and disrespect for human dignity? Are we so driven by our hormones that we are not capable of disciplining our own personal behavior and must give ourselves to fornication, sodomy, abuse of minors and seduction of the weak?

From blasphemy let us go to vengeance. We get so frustrated that we figure we must focus on an exterior enemy and then in that over simplified focus we take out revenge. We will right the wrong. Oh! we may not actually do anything but we may say, "Somebody ought to kill that guy." or "They ought to be put behind bars and or sent to a distant island with all the rest of them." But many of us do take drastic action. We yell at those closest to us and take an extra SWAT at our kids. Our desire for vengeance at the wrongs we are suffering calls us to look many times away from ourselves and vent our vengeful spleen on those who are weaker than we are.

God says "Vengeance is mine I will repay. I will be the judge." One must be careful, for the standards one hold for others will be the standards to be held for oneself. It is also said, "Judge not that you be not judged." You see, taking vengeance into our own hands is blasphemy for that is God's prerogative. Such false thinking is the gospel of terrorists who are driven by a radical view of God. Namely, that they know the mind of God and that he has made promises to them, selected them or elected them to do his work as they see his work. The terrorist has a grievance based on dogma or beliefs that he is representing the truth and the will of God.

Lord Kames, Scottish judge and writer, wrote,

"The indulgence of revenge tends to make men more savage and cruel."

Such persons are not humble but tend to be arrogant in their understanding of truth. Beware of those who speak and write as if they know better than others and who appeal to the pathology or sickness of a frustrated people. That includes not only the media but also the platform including the pulpit. When we act that way we deny our faith in God and set up ourselves as idols to be worshipped. Where is the attitude which said in our prayers, "Oh God forgive me a sinner." Oh yes how often we hear, "I sin like everybody else but this is one thing I draw the line on." We need to draw the line for ourselves first not just for others and we must strive not to sin like everybody else..

That leads me to guidance. Jesus said let the little children come unto me for of such is the kingdom of heaven. He also said in effect that it would be better for a person to have a cement block tied to his neck and he be cast into the deepest farm pond than that such a person should cause harm to one of the least of these. How horrible the blast which tore away the lives of so many children and maimed so many more and which put a dagger into the hearts of their parents. I am certain that Jesus would condemn such an act. For the King at the time of his birth so feared Jesus as child that he ordered many

innocent boys slaughtered trying to prevent Jesus from living. All around the world children are dying not just because of disease or lack of food but because of wars among the peoples of this planet.

But I would call our attention to what Jesus was really talking about and that is the guidance which should be given to children. Today, children are exploitable pawns by advertisers using them to coerce their parents to buy junk foods, or the latest toy or games. Children are courted to become the future smokers and drinkers of tomorrow and they are being taught they should become gamblers. They no longer are taught the virtue of delayed gratification, or the value of money or credit. The act of sex which brought them into being is seen as the avenue for the ultimate in human fulfillment as sexual gratification causes children to become mothers and those who fathered then to avoid any consequences of their act. Adulthood used to be the evidence of mental and spiritual maturity. Now physically mature adults act like children and do not grow up and take responsibility for maintaining the bulwarks of a safe society. A nation that no longer properly nurtures and guides its children will fall, and our nation is already falling. In fact historians looking back to this time may observe that it had already fallen.

It used to be that men were taught to respect women and children. Language was censored in their presence and they were to be protected from the harshness of life. I am no longer sure that the advances women have made, have been in all cases advances, and I am increasingly certain that women should not be combatants in war.

Guidance is not the sole responsibility of the schools. In fact schools should have presented to them children who have and are receiving guidance in a family setting. The school cannot satisfactorily be substituted for the family setting. The school's primary responsibility is to teach the skills necessary for literacy including the languages of mathematics, technology and vocational skills. We must devise other ways to develop substitute families when families break down or are not established in the first place. Dumping this on school teachers is not the answer. Few are able to do both well. It is more than they can handle. This does not say that adults working with children and youth should not be the best of examples as citizens and in their personal behavior.

The saying, "The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world" is still true but mothers are not the only ones rocking the cradle and many cradles are not being rocked except by the agony of discordant living in suburbs as well as the inner city. The real rocker of the cradle is modern day electronics including television, games and vehicles of pleasure. Where are the chores performed for the mutual good, where is the instruction in tidiness, where is the care of property including one's own clothes, where is the teaching of saving for tomorrow, where is the teaching of respect of elders, teachers and those in authority, where is the sense of accountability, where is the art of speaking truthfully. If the young do not have it, it is because they have not

received guidance from their parents rather they have received improper guidance by the very example the parents set before them. Such children then proceed to pollute the lives of other children. The peer pressure becomes unbearable unless the child has been reared to choose early their company and to know how to not only say "No", but also be able to provide for their group better alternatives.

In times of horror and shock we fly the flag at half mast and call for church bells to ring and order a day of sorrow. Is it not time to also call for a day of confession and repentance for not only our individual sins of commission but also our sins of omission? Is it not time that we look not just to our leaders, even the clergy but instead look into the mirrors of our own lives and consider what we have been saying and doing or what we have failed to say and do. Those who lead, even if they fulfill their roles, know well the adage "You can lead horse to water but you can't make it drink." We must of our own resolve drink from the well of truth and redemption. We must go to our knees in prayer to God for strength to rise and live as we should before and with our children, before and with our neighbors, before and with all citizens of this land.

How about making a contract with yourself and also one with your family? Think of the attitudes and practices in which you indulge that are not helpful to you or others - the area of harmful habits, eating practices, and care of your body. But these are minor if one considers attitudes and prejudices that destroy mind and spirit. Is prayer, if it happens, only of the asking kind, or is it of the kind that is quiet so you can hear the voice of God? Do you say, "Not my will but thine be done."

How about a contract with the family including shutting off the television for a month, avoiding any semblance of gambling even the Readers Digest and Publisher Clearing House lotteries. How about clearing all alcoholic beverages out of the house and all tobacco. How about clearing up the language and turning the volume down in discourse with each other. How about prayer at meals and teaching the children to pray at bedtime. How about reading the Bible and decent stories with your children. If you turn off T.V. you will have time as a family. How about singing together, playing together and working together. How about turning the volume down on all radios and noise machines, those electronic devices that supposedly play music.

How about taking your children with you when you vote teaching them to observe all things a good citizen should do? How about running for the school board or the city council or God help us the County Board of supervisors? If not that, work for someone you respect and help them get elected.

You ask what does the above have to do with religion? It has every thing to with guidance of the least of these. For, poor guidance or lack of guidance prepares the field for a harvest of blasphemy and vengeful action- the usurping of the role of God.

In olden times when things got so bad individuals fled their society and became isolated from it by becoming monks. Monks afflicted their bodies to beat down their passions and gave themselves to prayer. Some of it was genuine, some was a racket for others still in the world would bring them offerings and some monks lived as parasites. Some of us may need at certain times to retreat to get our act together. Too many of us have already retreated and sit in our parlors bemoaning the condition of things and expressing a sense of helplessness. Now is not the time to retreat. This is the time to become engaged in the world and work harder than ever before to live and teach and be the kind of person that reflects the light of virtue and service on the paths of all who walk our way.

What we do and what we say has a lot to do with the shape of the world in which we live and in which our children will live. God helping us!

Affirmative Action

Runnels, Iowa Christian Church

June 23, 1996

Scripture Mt. 10:26-33

Introduction: I always come to Runnels with a bit of hesitancy. It seems every time I come I either bring a blizzard or a thunderstorm. However, the cordial and warm reception we receive from the members of the church draws us back again and again to enjoy your Christian spirit and hospitality. It is also a privilege to be invited back by your pastors who have been my students and who having sat under my teaching have not felt that inviting me to speak to you will be bad for you. Perhaps, they having slept in my classes, felt my coming would give you a chance for a good rest.

I. The question of who and what is a Christian has been discussed and sermonized much through the centuries since Jesus shared his life on earth. But the first definition can be found even before Christianity became fully established. It came from Jesus himself as he was preparing to send out his first disciples to bring the message of God's love for His creation. He told his disciples that whoever acknowledged him before men he would acknowledge before God. Otherwise, if one was going to go out and teach and live as Jesus was teaching and living he could not do it halfheartedly. It was a total commitment which would expose one to being considered different and having a life style that contrasted with the life style of those about them,.

The temptation would be to not go all the way, to try to hide behind the cover of contemporary culture and not be counted as a complete follower of Jesus.

What does it mean to acknowledge or affirm ones support of Jesus today. It means to assert, declare, endorse, maintain, to express faith in, to admit to be true what Jesus was saying and teaching. But it means more than that, just affirming all the above. So far we have talked about talking about. To really acknowledge Jesus is to go further and to become involved in action, affirmative action. that is a behavior and life style that demonstrates that ones actions affirm the teachings of Jesus.

To be involved in action is to exert power, that is have an active quality of life, not just one of acquiescence or consent to what others may propose or be doing. It is not enough just to give money for a "good" cause and then wrap a cocoon of self righteousness around one which then insulates one from the evil which is continually perpetuated about us as persons of weaker will are exploited by all manner of parasites including even bureaus of the state in the name of good causes like education and repairing fair grounds.

You see religion is a fruit and Jesus said by their fruits shall they be known. How we enjoy fruit! But what do we do with it? We eat the sweet tasting flesh and throw away the seed. As supreme horticulturists we even try to develop fruit without a seed. That means that such a pleasurable satisfying fruit being seedless cannot be perpetuated. You see religion that deals just with the sweet by and by, love and be happy, sit by the side of the road and watch the world pass by is just the flesh of the fruit. A baptizing, marrying and burying religion is just the flesh of the fruit. The seed, the core of the fruit that is thrown away is where the action is. Unless the seed is planted in good ground and cultivated good fruits do not result. Jesus had problems with all the righteous formality of the religious practice of his day. He pointed out to his followers that they must affirm not only in their teaching but in their daily lives that which would bring the Kingdom of God. From the lowly offering of a cup of water, to the finger pointing judgment "thou art the man." From the terror of demons occupying empty houses to the punishment for persons causing child abuse. You see it is not enough to keep a soul free from sin, or a house not occupied by evil, for if affirming action is not operating from within that soul to build up a positive pressure against the encroachment of evil the consequent condition can be worst that the first. If in the name of the first amendment we persist in abusing the minds of our children the evil will breed itself exponentially from generation to generation. The worship of the false gods of liberty and freedom to pursue false happiness will displace the God of Love in our hearts and the hearts of our children and their children. Christians should question even so called good and enlightened people who seek to change the climate of the culture to one of open fruit eating and the throwing

away of the seed of morality. For the seed contains the moral integrity of the culture. Religion which does not discipline and teach the agony of being different from the prevailing culture is not a religion of affirmative action.

This is the year of the child. It is also the year when children become adults before their time because of T.V., computers, the internet and all the media is bringing to them. It is a time when there are no pleasures exempted from pursuit from sodomy to bestiality, from pornography to violence of ring and rink, from the use and abuse of alcohol, tobacco, drugs, legal and illegal, to glutinous consumption of food. It is a time when the rule is, "do others before they do you," exploit the old and cater to the weaknesses of the weak. It is also a year when evil gods are being lifted up on high places and altars are being built on which are placed human sacrifices. The love of God and neighbor is being neglected.

When nations follow after the gods of pleasure and exploitation history tells us that those nations will fall and suffer great punishment. The answer for America is not in the National Rifle Association, the answer is not in the American Civil Liberties Union, the answer is not in the militias, the answer is not in diversity of life style, the answer is not in electronic chips. The answer is in you and your own level of affirmative action. Through word and deed we must confess Jesus before our fellows. This means studying his teachings and relating them to this century. It means looking candidly at our manner of earning a living, our relationship to our family, determining whether we really have neighbors and how we relate to them. It means examining what is our role in our community. Do we vote in every election including the school board election? What sort of religious life do we practice at home. Do we give a prayer of thanksgiving to God for our meals, do we read together from the best of the Bible? Do we pray in Jesus' name or do we just curse in God's name. These are but a few of the questions we should be asking ourselves. Do we have the will to vote and throw out those who take the easy path which we ask of them instead of leading us in the way of discipline, sacrifice and good health, physically, mentally, morally and spiritually?

What does it mean to you to confess Jesus and recognize him as the Lord of your life? How do you answer the decision placed before you in the request, "Choose this day whom you will serve - the lord of life or the lord of evil?" How many times we use the excuse the devil made me do it, when we choose to serve the ways of evil. We can also choose to serve evil by being lukewarm about the eroding ways of evil in the lives of others. The fire burning next door can easily shed its embers over our dwelling.

To follow Jesus is to free ourselves from the notion that there is an adult world which allows behavior in which children should not participate. There is only

one proper behavior and that is the innocent behavior of the uncorrupted child. That is the only way heaven is available. To follow Jesus is to identify with the weaker brother and not engage in behavior which tempts him beyond his strength of will. Paul said that if I by eating meat sacrificed to idols, even if I do not believe there is any special power in the meat, cause a weaker brother to eat the meat thinking that it will give a special power than I will refrain from eating such meat. There are many things that we do and say in front of children and before weaker persons which lead them astray. It is hard in this multimedia culture for parents to rear their children free from the corrosive effects of the jaded, violent, and exploitative adult behavior.

The use today of another persons body for selfish reasons, the use of persuasion to turn the minds of others to buy into fraudulent schemes, and the appeal to the fears and insecurity of individuals to promote hatred and rejection of whole groups of people, classes, races, and religions are too common. Somehow we have lost the ability to hate the sin and yet love the sinner and seek for the sinners redemption. Is our hate because sinners look so much like us these days?

Paul in the letter to the Romans 6:12 wrote "Let not sin reign in your mortal bodies to make you obey their passions". In verse 23 he wrote "The wages of sin is death but the free gift of God is eternal life."

What a promise! What a hope! But we prefer the pleasures of the present to the promises of the future.

Sinful behavior is not unique to our age, but perhaps is more pervasive. In the Middle Ages the ideal was shown as a ladder to heaven which all tried to climb but were shot down by the arrows of evil demons. Only charity or love was protected by the angels of God and was successful in reaching heaven. The soldier and his female companion fell from the ladder not only because of their lust for each other but also by his desire for a beautiful horse and full shining armor, the nun was seduced by a priest, the clerk by a waving girl friend,, the monk was mesmerized by a basket of gold, the recluse by a soft bed and the hermit by his preoccupation with his little garden. Such trivial things, but unless one keeps ones eye on the prize of the high calling, total love of God and neighbor, then one can be distracted and fall from the ladder.

It is interesting to note the medieval depiction of the vices. They were in full armor countering every move of the virtues in their efforts to guide human beings to heaven. A partial listing of the vices include amour(sex), lasciviousness, beauty, sloth, voluptuousness, garrulity, indecency, coquetry and others. Nothing is said about murder, rape, robbery, or physical abuse. The vices sound like the virtues that Madison Avenue espouses and manufacturers use to tout their wares.

St. Catherine of Sienna wrote that self love destroys charity and affection toward neighbor and is the principle foundation of every evil. On the other hand Love of God enables one to love ones neighbor and underlies all the virtues of good human relations. Do not the vices listed above paint a picture of the self love of which Catherine was writing.

What does it mean to confess Jesus before men. It means in summary to love God with all ones heart and soul and strength and also to love ones neighbor as ones self.

An unknown poet penned these words:

"Who is thy neighbor? He who thou
Hast power to aid or bless,
Whose aching heart or burning brow
Thy soothing hand may press."

Confessing Jesus begins with ourselves at home with our family, at work with our colleagues, in our community with our fellow citizens and on travel with other tourists. There is no vacation from the love of God and neighbor and the opportunity to confess Jesus as Lord and Savior. Affirmative Action is a style of living.

The Care and Feeding of a New Pastor
Altoona Christian Church
September 18, 1994

Scripture: I Thes. 5:12-22

I. Introduction: I have enjoyed my visits with you and after today you can breath a sign of relief and I will have to go back to my "honey do' list because I won't have an excuse to give to my wife that I have sermon to get. Judging from the length of my sermons it must have been a long list that I was avoiding as I prepared my sermons. Which reminds me of the time when a deacon's wife remembered a roast that she had left cooking at home and she forgot to put it on a timer. Worried and in desperation she attempted to send a note by an usher to her husband who was seated on the front pew. Instead the usher thought the note was for the preacher and handed it to him. When the preacher paused in his sermon and opened the note it said, "Please go home and shut off the gas." Now I haven't gotten any notes yet, but some of you have been looking at your watches and some of you have had to be

punched by your husbands to keep you from snoring out loud. Or is it the other way around.

A. I come today to speak frankly and candidly about how to receive and support a new pastor. One might ask what my credentials are that I would presume to address you on this subject. But I believe my credentials when summed up are impressive. First of all, I am a child of the manse or the parsonage, otherwise a preachers kid. I know how ministers can be treated as well as their kids. It is not true that preacher's kids are the worse kids on the block. Any thing we learned of a mischievous nature was taught us by the elder's children. As I recall we were always admonished by our parents that we had to set a good example so as not to reflect on our parent's ministry. Secondly, when on the staff at our national headquarters I traveled widely and saw how churches and ministers were getting along. A traveling fireman can hear many tales from all sides about conditions in the local church. Thirdly, I taught for several years in a seminary and was a part of preparing men and women for the ministry. I must say the best schooling many of the future ministers got was from their experiences in student churches where long suffering and patient parishioners taught these budding ministers the practical things one needs to know to minister in the real world as contrasted with the classroom. Lastly, I have had several interim church experiences in my increasingly long life and I have preached this sermon before. So here it is. Listen carefully I may talk about someone you know.

B. Each minister is unique and it is not profitable to compare a new minister with previous pastors. God has given each of us gifts and we should relate to each other in such fashion as to bring out the best of our gifts in the service of our Lord. Yet ministers are made of the same material as all of us and should not be lifted up on a pedestal and expected to be divine and without emotion or feelings. Positive reinforcement of strengths and good performance of duties is very helpful. Otherwise we all can profit from genuine praise and expressions of appreciation for good work. Areas of weakness or neglect of duty can be handled best discretely and through the pastoral relations committee generally made up of elders. Gossip and whispering are not profitable nor edifying in any situation.

C. The minister should be protected from being unduly possessed by any one group in the church. The minister belongs to everyone and yet to no one except God. My father a minister through a long life in many parts of the country and in foreign lands counseled me to be particular friends of no one in the congregation but be friendly to all. He said, "Do not let one person, family or group claim you as theirs and do not share with any one your experiences and privileged information on the assumption that the person will keep a of confidence." So said my father. So don't pump the preacher for information

that should be private and between the minister and the one of his congregation who had confided in him. He will decide professionally what must be brought to the elders of the church. We all have those moments when we like to say but I heard that the preacher said so and so or the preacher told me. This does not mean that good fellowship should not be extended to the minister. Just treat him like a doctor or lawyer and respect the confidences that he must hold. Such a relationship will reinforce the fact that your minister can keep a confidence and you can go to him with your deepest problem for guidance and for direction where to go for additional help.

II. When the minister comes to town do not wait for him to come around. He is the stranger and not familiar with people or places. A conscious effort to introduce yourselves and others to him is important. Invite him into your home for a meal if possible where he can meet the whole family and get a feel or a smell for your situation. With my equipment I would mention smell. Invite neighbors in to a coffee to meet him. Early on take him to meet the town leaders in their offices, the bankers, the insurance people, the principals of schools, county supervisor and any others you can think of. Break the ice for him. When I was national supervisor of Student Work for the Disciples I would go in to visit a pastor of a university church located next to a campus and find that the minister had never met the president of the university or others of the staff of the university. I made a point of taking the minister with me when I met with the University president and his staff to break the ice for both the minister and the president. This is what you should, right off, do for the new minister.

III. At the same time do not expect the minister to come up immediately with full blown programs and ideas of how things should be. Give him time to get to know you and the situation. He needs to observe, listen, feel your pulse, meet with your committees before being able to come up with complete plans and suggestions of how things might better be. Much of what you do he will not want to change. It is what you are not doing he will want to change. When he is ready, give ear to and room for his ideas, Do not hide behind, "Well we've always done it that way," which may mean this has become the easiest way to keep from having to put out some real effort. It could also be that some of the program is not really religious or primarily the business of the church and is too much of a divergence from the real witness for Christ's Kingdom on earth. He may suggest putting out to pasture some of your sacred cows, speaking of programs not persons.

IV. Beware, however, of the temptation, "Now that we have a minister, he can do all the work." Don't yield to the temptation to lie down on the job or to back off from responsibilities. The minister properly belongs to the whole congregation and the ministry, the whole work of the church, also belongs to the whole congregation. Chairpersons of committees keep your committees

active. In fact you should all expect to work harder now than before as you all rally to make this place a genuine oasis for spiritual renewal for your families and for this community.

A. Be alert for the stranger in your midst. You have such a friendship with each other that you can become involved in conversation so absorbing that you let strangers slip in and out without being made to feel at home. I have been here six weeks and there are many of you who have not come up to me to introduce yourselves or to shake my hand. I must say you give the appearance of being very friendly with each other but not friendly with outsiders. Don't just depend on the guest book in the foyer or the register in the pew to find out that a stranger has been here. See them before they come out of the parking lot and greet them and see that they are introduced to and seated with some one. After the service don't let them leave without meeting many others. You have a church architecture that lets people escape so you should have several people appointed to cover all the doors to supplement the pastor greeting folks as they leave. Don't let any guest get out of the church without meeting the pastor.

B. Facilitate his pastoral responsibilities by letting him know of the needs and concerns of parishioners. Don't let him be the last to find out. At the same time be careful about what you include in his pastoral duties. Don't trivialize his agenda. My father once was called by a lady saying, "I contribute to your salary so you must take me to my dentist appointment." Let others in the congregation do the chauffeuring for the parish. Don't expect the pastor to take part in every march, every solicitation and buy all the cookies and Xmas wreaths, no matter how worthy the cause. The minister's family is a sitting duck for all the children to solicit and if I were ever your pastor I know you would never ask me to buy a chance on anything, not even a raffle ticket on the quilt at Ramsey Home.

Include your pastor in your family celebrations and anniversaries. It will introduce him to others and may give an opportunity to some one who needs to talk to a pastor the opening to approach the pastor or call him later. I say invite him to your celebrations unless your style is to pour on the liquor and be boisterous with invectives floating freely in the conversation. Then you may want to come to his office for confession.

C. Encourage your pastor to take and keep private time. Respect that time and do not be offended if he can not respond at once to your call. He needs time for study and sermon preparation, for meditation and his spiritual life. He needs time for professional fellowship and once in a while he should have leave for a period of study. He also needs time for recreation. If he fishes take him to your favorite spots including farm ponds. If he golfs or bowls, skates or skis, swims or hang glides help him find such opportunities.

You might also want to take out some accident insurance on the preacher. I think you get the point. However, do not let him become the official repair person for the church or the parsonage, no matter how talented he may be. Unfortunately, I seen pastors assuage their consciences for failing to put time on sermon preparation or calling on parishioners by spending undue amounts of time doing things around the church that members should be doing and doing better.

IV. How wonderful it is that you have now called to lead you in you ministry a pastor. I share your relief and excitement as you look forward to his coming November 1st. Between now and then especially lift him up in your prayers and yourselves that God will guide you together in an even greater ministry than the church has ever known. The fields are white unto harvest and you with your new leadership will bring in the harvest which should rival and be even more precious than the harvest of grain which even now is coming in from the fields of Iowa.

As Paul wrote to the Church in Thessalonica so he might write you as follows "I beseech you, brethren, to respect him who comes to labor among you and will be over you in the Lord and will admonish you, and to esteem him very highly in love because of his work. Be at peace among yourselves."

So I say to you let the teachers teach, the deacons serve, the elders pray, the choir sing and all praise God with a renewed hope and enthusiasm for the future service of this congregation to the greater Altoona community and the glory of God.

Christian Labor
Altoona Christian Church
September 4, 1994
John E. McCaw

Scripture: II Thes. 3: 6-13

I. Introduction: Can it be that School has already began once more, that fall is just around the corner and tomorrow is once more Labor Day. How is it that we celebrate one day as labor day when for many every day is a laboring day. There seems to be a derogatory attitude toward physical labor. We ask a stranger to us, what do you do and they may say that I am head of a department or I run my own business, or I am a doctor, lawyer, teacher. Some with apologetic posture may say that I just drive a truck or I am just a plumbers helper or I am just a janitor. To be a ditch digger or a sanitation worker is to be low on the totem pole. When immigrants came over they struggled with low paying jobs working several from street sweeping to mucking in coal mines so their children could go to college, or learn a skill to go up the ladder of success.

When my wife and I were traveling in China we were impressed by the labor intensive work performed. Huge boulders were broken up into big rocks and they into smaller rocks and they into little rocks suitable to give a crushed rock surface to a road. All of this was accomplished by men and women swinging large sledges and smaller hammers. In traveling up the Yangtze River I got off at one port and watched as an small army of men in a constantly moving circle had sand shoveled into two baskets fastened to a yoke which went over their shoulders. Down the planks they would come to the shore and then over to a hill of sand and then up other planks where their baskets were dumped and they began the circle again. I disrupted the procedure and motioned my desire to have one of the yokes placed on my shoulder. I estimated that it weighed at least 75 pounds per basket. These were much smaller men than I yet they performed that labor all day long.

I went up to a road where I saw persons carrying two baskets of white material which proved to be salt. I wanted to try to carry the load. A man I tried to stop would not be hindered but a woman stopped and understood my gestures. I took the yoke on my shoulders at a weight that I estimated to be about 50 pounds of salt per basket and then I started walking up the grade of the road. I soon found that there was a skill in keeping the baskets from swinging and bobbing and trying to twist off my shoulders. After a few yards I relinquished my burden back to the lady, bowing low in thanks for the privilege and she bowed and with a smile of pride shouldered her yoke and continued trotting up the hill with a smooth rhythm which kept the baskets moving as though they were floating up the hill.

However, in this country success has been equated with the absence of labor. We seem to flee callused hands, sore muscles and aching backs if it is connected with an occupation but let us get involved in some play which involves expending physical energy we take the arduous activity in stride, perhaps with a little groaning and the consequent rejoinder, "Well if you didn't have to play tennis so hard or go out for the church volleyball team you wouldn't have such sore muscles." How can one make all labor a pleasure? How can work become more like play? I could get rich if I could write a book answering those questions satisfactorily.

During the depression a farmer found a tramp sleeping in his barn. He woke the tramp and as he was berating him the tramp pled with him for work to do just for something to eat. He had not eaten for a long time. The farmer relented and took him up to the house and his wife fed him a big breakfast. Then the farmer showed the tramp a large pile of wood to be split thinking that would keep him busy most of the day. However about two hours later he was done asking for more work to do. The farmer was amazed and said that the manure needed to be cleaned out of the horse stalls. He knew that this could not be done in a day but by noon the stalls were clean and they all sat down to lunch. The tramp wanted more work and seemed still full of energy. The farmer could think of no more chores and turned to his wife for suggestions.

She said, "Well the potatoes in the cellar need sorting." So the farmer's wife took the tramp down the cellar and told him the spoiled potatoes put in these containers and we'll feed them to the pigs, the little ones put in this bin, the medium size put in this bin, and the large ones put in this bin. She left the tramp to do his work. The tramp did not come up all afternoon and the wife assumed he was slowing down and taking it easy. Late in the afternoon when the farmer came in from the field he asked how the tramp was doing. His wife said you know he is still down in the cellar. You had better go down and check on him. The farmer went down and found the tramp out cold lying on the cellar floor. When the farmer revived the tramp he asked what happened, you handled all the hard labor this morning? The tramp said it was not the labor. The decisions got me down. So this morning we should also remember to say a word on behalf of the managerial class who have a stressful existence making decisions.

A. The observance of Labor Day, a day set aside to recognize the worthiness of those who earn their living manually through bodily toil, is this year one hundred years old. On June 28, 1884 Congress set aside this day as a day of recognition and a holiday. Very soon all of the states followed suit. In the United States it is celebrated not so much as pitting employee against employer as is May first in Europe or even honoring workers as it is a family day of enjoyment before the winter sets in, the harvest begins, and the school year really gets under way taking up the parents time chauffeuring the children and attending games and performances.

B. In ancient Greek and Roman times labor was looked down on and toilsome duties were performed by slaves of which the wealthy had many. The Hebrew-Jewish tradition honored labor. In fact the commandment emphasized labor as well as rest. Labor was six times as important as was rest. Six days shalt thou labor and only one day shalt thou rest. This standard was directly from an example set by God as he labored for six days to create the earth and rested on the seventh. Also in Proverbs 6:6 there is the admonition to go to the ant thou sluggard, consider her ways and be wise.

The Christian tradition followed the Jewish respect for hard work which really surfaced in the Reformation in the so called Protestant work ethic which by some is given the credit for building the foundation for modern industry and capitalism. To a certain extent it can still be seen in the do it yourself syndrome. which can certainly be seen if one tries to shop on a Saturday morning in a discount building supply store. One can see the store jammed with wives with lists of needs dragging their husbands along. These husbands had promised in a weak moment to fix a storm window, put new washers in the spigots, or a new lock on the garage door. It is interesting to see the gleam in the wife's eye and the hangdog look on the husband's face.

II. As I have indicated the Christian attitude toward labor came right out of the Jewish attitude. A rabbi in his writing said, "Hate not laborious work." This was the rule of life. Even the scholar was expected to spend some of his time in manual labor. Jesus through most of his life was a carpenter. Early in his ministry his neighbors exclaimed, "Is not this the worker in wood." The followers of Jesus were chosen principally from those who labored, those who had the capacity for physical labor and endurance. Jesus expected no half hearted effort on the part of his followers. They were to work unceasingly as the harvest was plentiful and the laborers were few. Yet he saw his followers not as laboring servants but as friends involved in a cooperative effort. Jesus saw his mission as one who came to serve and not to be served. The washing of the feet of his disciples was a lesson in the nobility of the lowest form of work.

A. The Apostles maintained their Jewish traditions. Particularly Paul emphasized work. He wrote to the Thessalonians, "to aspire to live quietly, to mind your own affairs, to work with your own hands." (I Thes. 4:11). Also he wrote them in II Thes. 3:11-13 "For we hear some of you are living in idleness, mere busybodies, not doing any work. Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work in quietness and to earn their own living. Brethren, do not be weary in well-doing." You see many had in the expectation of Jesus' early return stopped working. Paul was even more harsh by branding one who does not work as a parasite. Even more harsh was his statement, 'If any will not work neither let him eat.'

Paul urged the converts to welcome a life of work. There would be several good effects from such a life: one would develop a quietness of spirit, one would gain honorable standing among neighbors, one would obtain independence from another man's alms and one would gain the ability to help those in need. Paul set the example by plying his trade as tent maker and called attention to the calluses on his hands caused by such efforts.

B. Later Christian writings supported the rule of the crafts that a person temporarily out of work should be given support for two or three days at most. Any more might result in a dependence that would not be good for the worker. At the same time the craft guild should help the unemployed person find work. New converts to Christianity who did not know a trade were admonished to learn one and become self supporting. Above all, Christians were not to spend time with the idle but to keep busily engaged in proper work. Christian workmen were not to be content with less than their best effort. Those who were more prosperous were not to exempt themselves from labor as undignified, but set an example of doing hard work even though they could afford to hire someone to do all of the arduous work for them. They were reminded that God labored in creation and continues to work in the present. As the end of the age did not come in the first generation of Christians, to the

degree persecution and prejudice against Christians did not inhibit their employment they were hired as teachers in the homes of the powerful, became civil servants and continued to ply their crafts, trades and skills. They used these as opportunities to witness to their faith by not only their spoken testimony but also by example.

C. There have been many times in the history of repression when Christians overcame in spite of restrictions. During the Stalinist times in the Soviet Union many Christians, mostly Baptists, were sent to labor camps in Siberia. When they had served their term if they were still alive they were not allowed to return home but had to settle in Siberia. Baptist house congregations sprang up all over Siberia. Party factory managers grew to depend on and sought out Baptists because they were trustworthy, industrious, dependable, honest and sober workers. Such workers helped these factory managers meet their national quotas. After the cultural revolution and the death of Mao in China it was discovered that Protestant Christians had multiplied by the hundreds of thousands in spite of repression. They did this by their good example and hard work.

III. The Christian through the ages should constantly examine the results and wider influence of his work or occupation. Not always have Christians discerned carefully and wisely how what they were doing fit into their Christian confession. Slave traders included some who were very pious. One slave trader, Captain John Hawkins even pulled back the hatches on his ship to read the Bible to the captured and chained slaves in case they should be human beings and had souls that could be damned if they did not hear the Gospel. . Thank goodness there were other Christians such as Wilberforce in Great Britain who led the movement to abolish the slave trade.

A. Today, we must constantly be alert as to the total affects of our work on others. Any occupation which panders to human weakness, is deleterious to health, is filled with temptation for the weak and the young should for the Christian be a questionable occupation. I knew a druggist when I was a boy, long before the use of tobacco was questioned as it is today, who refused to sell tobacco products in his store as matter of Christian conscience. I personally have no doubt in my mind about jobs having to do with the sale of tobacco, alcohol, films of violence and pornography and work in the gambling industry as jobs that a conscientious Christian should have a hard time accepting. The question is not employment, but what kind of employment. It is not income but from whence does the income come. In Nevada licensed prostitution is permitted. Will that be next in Polk county? Why not? It is the oldest profession and it happens all the time. It would be a way to raise money for schools and hospitals. It is interesting to hear the short term rationalizations engaged in by Christian politicians and Christian business

men who call vices recreational and do not care about the compulsive behavior brought into the lives of increasing numbers of the addicted. If Jesus were here I am certain he would pour scorn on those who exploit their fellows for gain. On this Labor Day let us examine what our work in doing to others. Is our labor a blessing to humanity.

IV. "Work for the night is coming when man works no more", so ran the old gospel hymn. Work is the center of life wherever life exists. Not only humans but all living creatures by necessity have to work to exist and multiply. Work is the basis for eating. We think of play as the opposite of work, but we do not play unless we have a full stomach or the assurance that a meal will be forthcoming. Christians need to evaluate the amount of time spent in play and how they rear their children to face the necessity of work. Work is first of all to provide the necessities for life which means that one must work not only for oneself but for others, young and old, who unable to work must be dependent on others for life itself. I do not have time to fully develop the Christian balance between work and play except to say play should be relaxing and rebuilding from arduous work. Play should contribute to the enhancement of ones ability to perform their role in society. When play including hobbies detracts from one's ability to perform on the job, takes away from parenting and other duties then such play becomes addictive and demonic or evil.

A. The Christian has a unique opportunity to blend obligation with pleasure. How does one define these terms. For the woman of the house it is an obligation to prepare the meals and clean up the kitchen. It is a real pleasure to go out to a restaurant to eat where one doesn't have worry what to cook and then cook it and can sit enjoy the meal, and particularly enjoy the thought that there will be no dishes, pots and pans let alone the stove and the sink to clean up. That is pleasure. However, some pleasure of companionship can result if husband instead of slipping off to read the paper or watch the Monday night football game stays in the kitchen and helps clean up. It would be a real Christian act on his part for him to say, "Honey you got the meal. You get out of the kitchen and I'll clean up." You know I'm not yet that good a Christian. But then I suppose he could say I'll do the dishes if you will go out and cut the grass. But then she comes in and says the mower wouldn't start.

Obligation has to do with duties, that which one should perform for the sake of the well being of others as well as oneself. A Christian does not shirk ones obligations and the attitude one has in carrying out of obligations can even bring a certain amount of pleasure into the process of fulfillment. Pleasure is more often in a sensual and emotional setting. When sought for itself leads to satiation and even disgust. Each time I go to a cafeteria or a potluck I look with great anticipation at all the dishes but by the end of attempting to eat everything I have put on my plate I feel a real disgust in the last bites and that happens even when finishing up with desert. I have not

brought myself to start with desert first. Pleasurable activity can be perverted and habituated so that as the satiation passes one feels the hunger to seek fulfillment again. Christians must arm themselves against such slavery. One can seek pleasure to avoid facing other troublesome concerns in life or about one's situation. How often we choose to divert our attention from something that needs to be done by going to a movie, turning on T.V., or even turning to drink.

B. Where in lies satisfaction for the Christian. Satisfaction is generally the feeling one has after a task has been completed or as certain portions of a complex work is being accomplished. Satisfaction is felt internally by knowing that one has accomplished his work with skill and integrity. Satisfaction is felt externally by receiving praise and compliments on one's accomplishments. For the Christian if one's accomplishments are related to the service and welfare of others and not to their exploitation then comes satisfaction. However, the norm for satisfaction for the Christian is eternal in the hope to hear from God himself, "Well done thou good and faithful servant. Is that your hope as you sit here before me today or have you given up on an eternal frame of reference? Are you a follower of Christ or are you a follower of yourself? Do you think and live for Christ or do you sing the song living for me?"

C. How does one cope in a job doing their labor when the work environment is laborious, monotonous, humdrum, non challenging, non-enhancing, even debilitating and dead end. Christians have the power of Christ's companionship even in such a job. Every venue is an opportunity to witness by the quality of spirit one projects. One's prayer life can give strength for such situations. Bitterness and complaining does not contribute to one's ability to cope or elevate one's relationships with others. Miracles sometimes happen because of a Christian attitude on the job. Jobs and working conditions become changed, opportunities for other employment appear and even strength to leave and pursue other employment comes.

IV. Lastly this morning let us consider the role of religion in the workplace. Certainly one should not preach or pontificate on the job. One can bear witness by declining to subscribe or to support activities or causes against one's conscience. One does not have to participate in office pools, in alcoholic drinks for the gang, or in putting down a fellow worker. Many times silence is golden. However, one actively witnesses by their general character. Their language, their attitude, their lack of prejudice, their concern for the welfare of others will reveal their character. A Christian should portray the peace that passes understanding. The Christian opens up to listen to others when they want counsel and directs them to help. A Christian can invite others to come to their church and Sunday school class and study groups. The main witness of a Christian in the work place is to be Christian. That is to be a Christian. This does not mean a dour face, a negative attitude or licking the bosses

boots. It means bringing happiness to the work place and working with skill, integrity and zeal. It means honesty in opinion, counsel and advice. It means healthful habits and keeping ones body and mind and spirit in the best of shape.

Tomorrow is Labor Day. Let this be a time of evaluation for the Christian. Remember most of ones waking hours are spent on the job and this is not the time or the place to check out of ones Christianity. You come to church to tank up, to get fuel to be an effective Christian for the rest of the week, most of which will be at work. Go to it now, be a Christian at work!

Living in the Midst of Instability
Altoona Christian Church
August 14, 1994

Scripture: I Thess. 5:1-22

I. Introduction

A. Greetings

1. It had been sometime since I last occupied this pulpit or rather I should say the pulpit of the Altoona Christian Church, for this is a new building in a different location. I commend you on this offering to God and this community in the form of this lovely building. My wife and I look forward to being with you for the next few Sundays, not only for what help we may be to you but also the help you will give to us. Maxine and I are always enhanced spiritually when we have the opportunity to worship with other Christians in their church home.

2. A year ago we were in the midst of a very wet season not able to plant crops or harvest the ones planted. This year if all continues the way it looks we will not have enough bins in which to store our crops.

3. This is also a year of much tragedy both here and abroad. Our media squeezes out the last drop of the gory details. Not only is reality made vivid but movies, talk shows and even sports give us huge doses of violence and perversion. Whole peoples are dispossessed all around the world and large groups in our own land of promise float around in realms of uncertainty and enmity. The condition of things is enough to disillusion one.

B. Throughout history peoples and their cultures have had periods of disillusionment because of ineptness, graft, corruption, and outright evil which permeated throughout their society even up to the top levels of commerce and

government. Consequently they have looked to messiahs, deliverers, and new leadership to bring about changes. In most cases it has been politically impossible to bring about change because of vested interests. Changes would require sacrifice which no one wanted to do. In the past, ultimately, change was brought about by revolution from within or by the culture becoming so decadent that it fell before outside conquerors who invaded the land. Under either revolution or invasion the new regimes did not bring freedom or an end to corruption but merely substituted one corrupt regime for another. In desperation people looked to exterior deliverers, particularly from the heavens. In Judaism in the time of Jesus there were messianic movements. There were also terrorists and revolutionaries. Increasingly there were prayers to God for divine intervention.

C. I recently restudied the literature about the so-called "Dead Sea Scrolls" which, on restoration and translation, reveal much about the Jewish religion that Jesus practiced. This study reinforced my understanding that Jesus' teachings were set against the back-drop of political instability and oppressive rule by the Romans. There was also a vast change in life styles, lowered moral standards, much poverty, and personal insecurity. Times were so tough that many people were looking for a Messiah sent by God himself to bring judgment on evil-doers, and to deliver them from Roman oppression, restoring to them freedom, security, and plenty. Many others at the same time, learned to work within the system and practiced a philosophy of "Get while the getting is good," "Do others before they do you," "Grease palms and bribe in order to get one's objective." In the midst of all there was much "Eat, drink, gamble, and be merry, for tomorrow we die."

D. It also occurred to me that there is a significant parallel between Jesus' time and our time. Similar problems exist, not just in our country, but throughout the world. As people rise up against oppressors, take vengeance for ancient grievances, get displaced by war, face economic depression caused by world-wide market forces, see personal hopes dashed by unemployment, death of loved ones, or instability of personality, caused by drugs, including alcohol and tobacco and perverse life style they become increasingly desperate and disillusioned.

E. The desire for an earthly leader to miraculously cause a restoration of the good old times and bring security is being sounded louder and louder in our own country. One person was even, I think, frightened away from the political arena in the last presidential election when he saw that he was being led to assume a messianic role being given him by his enthusiastic followers.

1. The possibility of a people turning to one person to deliver them can have awful consequences. Hitler, Mussolini, Franco, and countless lesser

dictators of a past generation, came into power because of the desire of masses of people to have someone "fix things." This could also happen here.

2. In contrast to the human way of revolting, Jesus' message in his time was not about political change but about personal change. The church that was founded in his memory was not founded on a particular nationalism or a political regime but on teachings that would, if practiced, sustain a quality of life for each and every person in this world and an existence in the next world that was eternal.

3. Through the ages the church has had to resist, and not always successfully, the identification of national, ethnic, or political goals with its own goals.

4. In our own church its energy is spent to a greater and greater degree in trying to correct social and political problems and less and less on advocating high standards for personal behavior and life style.

F. The true character of the Christian Church founded upon Jesus' teachings, was universality—all inclusive, yet extremely personal.

1. Robert, Barbara, William, Susan—whatever your name is-God loves you. Love one another.

2. Poor, rich, strong, weak, black, yellow, brown, white, every tongue—God loves you. Love one another.

II. The message of the early church was how to live until the new age came.

A. The emphasis was basically moral which included such as the following:

1. The development of personal integrity. That means to know and have a high regard for one's self.

2. The establishment of stable family life. That means the maintenance of a healthy social womb for the rearing of the young.

3. Devotion to industry, or hard work. That means work which contributes to human welfare and does not cater to human weakness.

4. Giving over getting, or the practice of charity.

B. We are in a period when everybody is calling for change. They are speaking mainly about change in Washington and in state houses, as well as in county and municipal governments. We are now wrapped up in a national discussion on health insurance, where economics, including the high cost of medical treatment, is the central issue. Yet, everyone wants to continue living as usual and having medical coverage to pick up the pieces resulting from

their perverse life-styles. It is impossible to insure even with government subsidy human foolishness and perversity. Very little, however, is being said about change in individual lives which was the emphasis in early Christianity. Nations and cultures can only be changed by the leavening, or yeasting, brought about by changes in individual lives. Church members today have become so absorbed in the practices of contemporary culture that their life-style can hardly be distinguished from non-church members. Their families are influenced by the secular media, which comes into their homes electronically, preaching values that are pagan, violent, corrupt, and immoral. The call today should be for church members to withdraw from this kind of world and become different in their personal practices, including their relationships to other human beings.

III. I say to you today—do not look primarily to political leaders for salvation and for significant changes in our society. Look first of all into the mirror of your own life. May I urge you

A. To become a secure person in God— This means that one must come to know God by taking time to visit with him and listen to what he has to say. This is called prayer which is not something that happens only on Sunday in the church. Prayer each day is even more important than the food you eat each day. Talking it out with God keeps one properly focus, focused away from oneself toward the goals that God has for one's life

B. To raise up sons and daughters with God-enforced lives, who will with integrity be enabled with genuine creativity to serve in all areas of social encounter.

C. To aggressively represent or evangelize the Christian way of life and ask others to accept the discipline of Christian living. This means among other things truth in economic matters such as personal finances, dependability as a character trait so one's yes is yes and one's no is no. This means personal qualities which attract others to one's way of life so that they will say, "How Christians love each other and how they enjoy the challenge of life."

D. To learn to be thankful and not complaining or whining. Modern advertising is so geared as to make one a dissatisfied, insecure person who will then be saved by buying a miracle product. We are so used to quick fixes that we do not have the patience to think beyond present inconvenience and be thankful to God for the opportunity of life itself.

IV. The local congregation should be a fellowship of those giving strength to each other in the pursuit of Christ-like qualities. The early Christian church

provided an oasis in a desert, a source of mutual support, a bonding of persons in common cause, and a refuge for the weary and worn. This is still the mission of the local congregation. I remember an old hymn we used to sing which had the words, "Rescue the perishing, care for the dying."

A. Paul, in writing to the congregation at Thessalonica, gave pertinent advice: (Thess. 5:13b - 18) Be at peace among yourselves. And we exhort you, brethren, admonish the idlers, encourage the faint hearted, help the weak, be patient with them all. See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all. Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

So, let us not lose sight of the reason for the local church's existence. It is to enable those who band themselves together in a congregation to come out of the world and be different, gaining strength from God and each other. Then they are better equipped to go back out into the world to leaven the workplace, the government office, the factory, the farm and all areas where human beings meet each other so that change toward the good, the moral, the constructive, or indeed the divine principles of human existence may be brought about. As this happens, the Son of God does indeed return, for we have accepted his message to bring about the kingdom of God on earth and can truly pray, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

Spiritual Conditioning
Covenant Christian Church
March? 1987

Scripture Colossians 3:1-17

This time of the year reminds us that we are approaching the climax of the Basketball Season. All of this emphasis on athletics points to the fact that there can be no achievement with excellence unless there have been years, certainly, months, hours, day after day of conditioning. For a person can only maintain oneself within the contest if one's body has been brought to heel. If his body has been brought to the place where it is obedient to his will. To the place where a person, striving mightily, can call forth reserves laid in store through hours and hours of agonizing conditioning. When I see these young men and women going to our schools at 6 o'clock in the morning in order to

workout, staying till late in the dark in the evening, in order to work out I am filled with admiration

My friends, it inspires me, at the same time it makes me somewhat anxious because all too soon the objective for which the young people train themselves so mightily will be forgotten. Too soon, in middle age, they will be sitting in easy chairs watching TV--Sunday and Monday night's football games,. It is the men of which speak. During the day the ladies will be watching soap operas. Excuse me! Not now. For the ladies having worked a job all day now have to settle for football.

Rapidly do we move from an age of leanness, strength and endurance to an age of obesity, weakness and inability to run the course of life. Also, all too quickly, we take on habits which are physically debilitating. Whether they be the caffeine habit, the nicotine habit, the aspirin habit, the tranquilizer habit, also food and booze. Physical conditioning, my friends, is necessary not only to win athletic contests in high school and college, but our bodies are given to us as vehicles for our souls. They are to be kept in supreme condition. We were made not to be sedentary but to exercise. Practically every person who does manage to have genes for longevity also has had the kind of life, the major portion of which, calls for physical exertion.

If it is important that the body be kept in condition for life, how much more important that the spiritual being be kept condition. I would insist that time after time the degeneration of the body can be directly tied to neglect of the spiritual condition. For when the will can no longer control the body it proves that the will is no longer under the spirit of God. There is a direct relationship, a direct correlation, between one's sense of stewardship under God and one's relationship to ones body. They belong together and their health is bound together.

The early Christians had a way of emphasizing the necessity of spiritual conditioning. They soon developed a church calendar denoting seasons of the year. They did this partly out of self-defense because all about them was the secular year which we now have. The early Christians recognized that they should have a special cycle different from the secular cycle. They built toward one occasion, an occasion which happily at that time coincided with the pinnacle in the events that gave birth to the religion of Christianity, namely the delivery of the Jews from Egyptian slavery which is called Passover. But for Christians it was the occasion of the deliverance of all mankind through the sacrifice, crucifixion and "resurrection" of Jesus. Unfortunately Passover was replaced by Pagan Easter which was taken over and made the Christian observance. So annually they cleaned house spiritually and began the process of spiritual conditioning down to the place each could say with honor

that Christ you have died for me. I now present my life purified for you. It did not mean they came up lackadaisical and sporty at Easter with bunnies, eggs, ham and drinking. They realized that they were His people and they must purge themselves of the accumulations of the past year and continue behaving as followers of Jesus.

Now we have Lent, 40 days of cleansing, spring housecleaning spiritually, to bring one back in shape and remind oneself that Jesus did it all. It is true that customs have developed to the place where before Lent there is still one last fling before Ash Wednesday. So we have Mardi Gras where some cut loose, over indulge and then go into a period of denial. So it is hoped that if one denies oneself 40 days it makes up for the rest of the year when one did not do so well.

That wasn't the intention of the early Christians. The intention was that the Christians would examine themselves continually and purge themselves of all things that were dross, developing a life style that prepared them to come to the celebration of the resurrection on the first day of every week. Even if focusing on Easter was a good thing because life can creep up on us and involve us to the place where we seem not able to hold to the spiritual standards of which Paul wrote. Pretty soon Easter is just another Sunday and pretty soon every Sunday just another day and pretty soon those who walk to the church and those who walk by it cannot be distinguished. Very quickly the church is irrelevant and that is the age that we are in today.

My friends this is one year when we must be very sure that in approaching Easter we examine ourselves to see what we can do as individuals and as a congregation to purge ourselves and become worthy to celebrate our salvation. What sort of spiritual conditioning can we do? There is always self-denial. That includes fasting. I think everyone of us could examine our manner of eating and do something there. We might feel better. There always the possibility of examining the amount of time that we spend before the "boob" tube. Think of all of the soap operas and game shows that are used to fill the day. How about 30 minutes a day in prayer, meditation and Bible reading. Wouldn't that be something? If we meditated on our knees we would be sore to the bone.

During this time we might also think about our relationship with others in our life. Maybe some of our life style not only harms us but also harms those who are closest to us, our family for instance. I am speaking about smoking tobacco, drinking alcoholic beverages and even gambling at the local casino. With all of the scientific evidence available no one can live easily with his or her Christianity and smoke. What about the example set before the children. Jesus said that if you cause one of these little ones to stumble it is better you

have a cement block tied around your neck and be tossed into the middle of the pond then that you would cause such to happen. Are not the binges of youngsters the result in many cases of having parents who were tobacco, alcohol and "pill" users. Now would be a good time o swear off, folks.

You say, "But I enjoy it." but you are setting the example before the youngsters. The other day a teacher called a home about a fifth-grader caught smoking at the elementary school and the parents said, "Oh well we let him smoke at home." No doubt, because dad and mom do. I've said my piece and it's about time that Christians really get into condition to run the spiritual race.

Lent also presents an opportunity to stop a relationship which is not healthy and a friendship which has become possessive and dispossessing. Sometimes we are so close to each other in some modes of relationship that may dispossess others who have rightful relationships. In our Scripture Paul wrote about such. There is also the problem of stewardship entrusted to us in relationship to resources that are not ours. Sometimes it happens that we "borrow" money belonging to others hoping to replace it later only to find that that later comes too quickly and one is caught short. Such breaking of trust is called embezzlement. The temptation to use money and resources in our care for our own advancement can be great when one has an addiction. I have spent many hours with men who finally had to face the agony of making restitution. We are stewards not only of other people's resources but also other people's time, other people's health, and safety. As Christians when we do not do what we should do in relationship to others forgetting the parable of the Good Samaritan we have forgotten who our neighbor really is.

But this is also an opportunity for positive application. To start new habits, habits of relating to each other in true love and forgiveness. There are brothers who have not spoken to each other and sisters in the same family who have carried on a feud for decades. This is the time to break the ice and to love. It is the time to start speaking the truth to and stop lying to yourself. The Scripture says that God through his Spirit keeps renewing us and once we get into this aspect of spiritual conditioning we become a new person. The new person is a person of compassionate kindness and humble gentleness and patience filled with Love that "passes all understanding." Spiritual conditioning enables a person to be virtuous in non virtuous times and if necessary, lay down ones life as a redeeming sacrifice for others. For spiritual conditioning Jesus is our example and God is our trainer.

Forgiveness

First Christian Church Ottumwa

Decade of the 1980s

Scripture M att. 6:5-15

The art of human relations is big business. All people want to be people. They're not satisfied in being simply persons. To belong, to be accepted, to have someplace from which to go away and to return is basic to the human existence.

Human relations, the understanding thereof, is the basis for the exploitation of human beings. Every salesman, properly trained, knows that before he sells a product, he must establish rapport and sufficient confidentiality with the customer, in order to lead him to the commitment.

The art of human relations, I say, is big business, and has been subjected through the ages to various types of fads, all in their way, no doubt, good. Books on deep breathing, on meditation, and How I Saw the Light. , into transactional analysis, by way of tea groups, sensitivity training, Indiana plans, on and on and on, dealing with some aspect of the relationship of human being to human being.

Practically every one of them involves also the reactive result, in some cases the first intention of self-discovery. For to know another requires the knowledge of one's self. Not that one would imperiously project one's self image on another and create others in their own image, but rather that human beings are so much alike. That if you live fooling yourself, you also live really not taking seriously another.

Christianity has something to say about the art of human relations and, I believe, adds a dimension which too often is missing. Perhaps the greatest weakness in close human relations, particularly inside the family, is the failure to practice forgiveness. Forgiveness. Forgiveness means literally to send away, to get rid of, to give away, to remit, or cease to blame. To forgive is to establish a relationship without leaving one side of that relationship psychologically in debt.

It means literally to restore equality. To lift another back into total fellowship. But forgiveness is not easy, it's difficult. It's difficult because of the passions and the emotions and the scar tissue that are roused and result from human relations that were corrosive, that were debilitating, that were destructive, that were exploitative, that were hurtful. So it's difficult to forgive, because the one

who must forgive must deny his basic nature, which time after time is to seek revenge. To balance the score, the eye for the eye, the tooth for the tooth, the hurt for the hurt. It's also difficult to forgive because many of those whom we forgive do not seek our forgiveness. How does one forgive a person who does not even feel the need to be forgiven. Who, if even aware of having hurt you, feels that it was proper, perhaps proper chastisement, proper admonition, proper instruction, to have put you down.

How does one forgive one who feels no need for forgiveness? Or how does one forgive without exalting one's self and, consequently putting down the forgiven? For self-righteousness is the sin of the righteous. How does one really, really cope with deep seated anger and hurt. That anger and hurt which comes when a child repudiates everything that he's been taught and curses out his parents. Or when a mate proves perfidious and deceitful and leaves one in the midst of a task unfinished, resulting in the ruin of one's family. How does one cope with deep seated anger and hurt and come to forgiveness? It is not easy and it is not easy for one to stand in a pulpit and say forgive. For I know it is not easy to forgive.

But nevertheless, forgiveness is the cement of a community, of a family, of any close personal living. Without it, we degenerate. Our civilization goes to pieces. For without forgiveness and acceptance and restoration, there's disintegration.

How often I've seen that in the breakup of the family leading to divorce, more often it was the result of an accumulation of chronic unforgiveness, rather than a radical fault, like alcoholism, poverty, infidelity. How often brothers and sisters have maintained a family quarrel, carrying it even into the funeral of their parents. How often colleagues at work did not forgive and got at each other at the expense of the business and the production line. The lack of forgiveness takes a terrible toll. It's not easy. Yet without forgiveness, the very integrity of human relations is gone. And there could be no corporate sense of forgiveness within a society, unless it is the accumulation of the smaller, but yet the most fundamental aspect of forgiveness, in the home, between blood relations, between friends, in the neighborhood, in the community.

But forgiveness is not a one-way street from the forgiver to the forgiven, to the one who needs forgiveness. Actually, forgiveness is the need of the forgiver. When one has truly taken the difficult path of extending and giving forgiveness, there's a peace that comes that passes understanding. There is a release of tension. There is an inward freedom, which soon becomes outward.

When one forgives, one empties the space that they need for the emotional packages of their life and gives room for themselves to be more whole in the total composite of being a human being.

A person who has that which is unforgiven, or has that which he has failed to forgive, is like the person who has a closet which is so full of the accumulation of stored articles, good, bad and indifferent, that they cannot use that which is within, because it is lost in the accumulation. Rather than go hunt for some buttons or some thread or some tools or for some lumber, we go to the store and buy some more, because we don't know where it is. Actually, these closets are so full that to open these doors brings jeopardy, lest it all comes out in an avalanche down upon one.

The emotional closet of the human being is filled with those things that one has not forgiven, messes up one's life and they cannot sort out the emotions properly and they cannot really go in to find love, when they need to give love to someone else. They turn to gestures of little effort, maybe a flower from the greenhouse. There's nothing wrong with flowers, don't get me wrong. We use the artificial. We try to buy our way or do the nice things, or even a note, card, birthday card or something. When down deep underneath what the people are really looking for, perhaps not even know they're looking for, is the act of forgiveness on our part, so that we can cleanse ourselves and open up our emotional closet and get it organized so we can use it.

Actually, forgiving of another is the forgiving of self. For unforgiving is unforgiven. The unforgiven is the hardest on the self who should forgive. There is no neutral spot for unredressed injury. Unredressed injury leads only to weakness. But forgiveness is power. But more than the whole aspect of human relations, forgiveness is a fundamental sine qua non, for proper human relations, more than the horizontal aspect of that, is the fact that forgiveness is a Christian necessity.

Forgiveness is power in human relations, yes, but forgiveness or failure to forgive involves our relationship to God. I need not remind you of the last verse of the scripture that was read this morning, for that relationship to God in this area involves stern consequences. For God will hold us off until we stop holding off those we should forgive. Not only are human relations severed, but our relationship with God is broken and our prayers to God become like an audible voice in an empty auditorium ricocheting back to us, being absorbed by no audition. Life becomes a lonely, or a desperate drive to fill and distract. I see evidence all through our culture today, from the high places of almost erotic exuberances and athletic jamborees, to the extreme sadistic and masochistic fare fed to us by the filmstrip, whether it be in the theater or the TV, to the way we buy our clothes, go out to eat and seek to

have that kind of expression that can kind of cause us to forget Watergate, to forget inflation, to forget the tensions at home.

The whole drive is to fill and distract. God maintains a painful existence for us in our separation from him. That separation is because we refuse to forgive those who have grieved us.

Forgiveness involves the heart, the whole being, the central aspect. It is not something that one can flip off of one's finger. It involves the whole reorientation inside. It's anxious and it's awful. For the Christian, it's not just a formal, right of absolution, but a fundamental reorientation. But the real dilemma comes in the fact that while we can agree that this is reasonable and we ought to do it and it's fundamental to human relations, but we just don't have the ability, even with inclination, to take that step to forgive. Somehow or another, the awful debt that the person owes us that can never be repaid, they've cut a limb off, they've cut our heart out, they've destroyed us in more ways than one. Taken our job away. Destroyed our objective. Messed up our cause.

We don't have it within us to forgive, because we can always see that difference. But my friends, this is the message that God has given us. That he has given us the capital with which to repay all debts and to make things beautiful again. For God created us with the hope that we should live in happy harmony, yet we sinned against him and we continue to sin against him. Yet that did not stop him, he sent his son to us as an atonement to teach us that the way to live is to accept from God's treasury store that which heals and restores.

His Son's life for our sins and for everybody's sins, God has forgiven us. We need only to act in the same fashion to really receive the benefit. That's what Jesus was teaching. Millions of dollars forgiven by a generous master and yet we refuse to go out and forgive those things which we can measure and know and feel and see, because they were events which created the rub.

My friends, Jesus is teaching us that if God can so forgive us, we ought also to forgive our fellow human beings. So you see, forgiveness for the Christian is not only a human virtue, but a prize of divine dimension. Divine dimension, to know and to receive the forgiveness of God. To have His acceptance. Oh friends, 'tis sad that our relationship to God is based upon faith and not words. But I would have to say that the teaching of this morning from the scripture is that the consummation of our faith in God is the work of forgiveness.

So friends, if God can forgive you and all mankind, so should we forgive others.

Recovery of Heritage
 Ottumwa First Christian Church
 June ? Decade of 1980s

Scripture II Kings 23:1-3

The subject today is recovery of heritage. One need only look back through the history of man to discover his periods of dilemma and perplexity have been directly related to those periods when he has forgotten his heritage. Where there has been not only a forgetfulness, but an improper transference, from one generation to another, of those things which make for quality of life. In Josiah's time Israel had been conquered and foreign religions were forced in. During these periods of loss of heritage, there are certain common elements. These elements include the lacking knowledge, or decreasing knowledge of ethical and moral norms. It includes a situation where the young watch the adults, their parents, do what is right in their own eyes. It includes a period, if you would read the writings describing these periods, when things seem to be falling apart. When no one is to be trusted. When there is scandal breaking all about in the highest of places. When man's life seems to be involved in litigation and persons find that their savings and such wealth as they have is exhausted by the processes of man confronting man in the courts of the land and by the increases in taxation.

It is a period when persons, who are entrusted with little, manage to take even a little for their own and gradually erode, by the accumulation of the mass distrustfulness, vast sums and vast amounts, increasing then the charge against those who would buy the product. It is a period when the life savings of the old, the middle class and the poor increasingly disappear. It is a period when the marketplace becomes a shambles. Now, if any of this description seems familiar to you from your reading of history, then it's because this is the history of man. If it seems familiar to you because this is the life that you're living, then this is rather strange that I should be speaking about the rediscovery of heritage to this generation.

But at least we know this, that this was the style of life in the time of Josiah. When as they looked about them, Josiah, a leader who felt insecure and uncomfortable about the way things were going, felt the urge at least to bring back into repair the house of the Lord. In that process they discovered, at least a redaction, of the Book of the Law, the Torah, probably Deuteronomy.

and perhaps the whole Pentateuch. They rediscovered their heritage and they began to read it. If you read the verses following, you will see the type of deformation which besieged that land and the turning away from their previous style of life.

This has been the history of man, that when he neglects and forgets his heritage, his lifestyle degenerates. Perhaps it would be well to illustrate what happens in more modern times when a people rediscover their religious heritage. Some of you have read in the newspapers of Jesus freaks. Of youthful fundamentalist groups. Recently, there was an article, at least in our paper, which talked about some parents, one couple, trying to kidnap their practically grown 20-year old son, to get him away from a movement which had rediscovered the scriptures. And in their reading of the scriptures, were attempting to take them on face value and to apply them. These good church people, and I would say even "Christian" people, were filled with consternation that their boy, captive by this way of thought, should turn his back upon the comfortable, respectable life which their church people parents were living.

My friends, I get as much reverberation from good "Christian" people at some of the so-called aberrations of their youth, their youngsters, in relationship to religion, as I do in the aberrations of their youngsters in relationship to alcohol or drugs. And some even see a parallel. What I'm saying is that when the Bible is not the center of the home, and it becomes lost as a heritage for the young, they will rediscover it and great will be the turmoil thereof.

In World War II, before it was over, in Northern Italy, in the town of Toronto, where many of you perhaps fought, there was a group of young ladies, girls, who were torn with consternation. The glorious system provided for by Mussolini had deteriorated. He'd turned out to be an insufficient leader. The Italian forces were not able to cope with the threat of the Allies. The Germans had moved in and taken over and to all intents and purposes, the Italians were prisoners of war. The Partisans and Communists were coming with their points of view and fighting desperately. These girls had grown up under the pious care of their Roman Catholic mothers torn by the aggressive partisanship of their Communist fathers. And they had no heritage any longer that was consistent and unitary. Suddenly, as though guided by the Holy Spirit, they turned to the New Testament and they began to read the New Testament and it began to speak to them. And from this came the Focolare Movement, a sort of hybrid sisters movement, which has spread through various parts of the world, particularly among Italians.

It is in Detroit and Chicago and New York and Ottawa and other places in Canada, in South America, in Italy, and, of course, very widespread in northern Italy. There these girls rediscovered their heritage and they read the

scriptures quite literally and began to practice and to expect from God what was promised in those scriptures.

In the early 1900's in this country, there was a movement of return to the Bible, which expressed itself eventually in what is known as the Pentecostal Movement, where people reading the Bible began to straighten out their style of life and began to expect the fulfillment of some of the promises, all of the promises in that Bible. They began to believe that if you have faith, faith in God and pray, your prayers will be answered. The Assemblies of God and churches of God, and many other movements, such as the Nazarenes, came forth and grew in adherence and developed a reformed style of life.

Even before that, there was a man by the name of Russell, who in reading and listening to the preaching that talked about a God, who pre-destined man to eternal damnation, went back to the scriptures and concluded that this was not the picture of God that the scriptures painted, but rather the picture of the theologians, particularly Augustine. Eventually evolving from these Bible study groups came to be the Jehovah's Witnesses, one of the fastest growing movements in the world. And shortly before was another man who went back to the scripture and his name was Miller and from him came the Seventh Day Adventists. About the same time was another man by the name of Joseph Smith, going back to the scripture and indeed to further revelation and from him came the Mormons.

Going back further, there was a scholar in Oxford, who was somewhat sensitive, reared by a very devout mother. A preacher's kid, who came over to Georgia, fell in with a Bible-loving group by the name of Moravians. And coming back, studied the scripture and got turned on and the Methodist movement was founded. A movement, which helped preserve England in a time of great stress and the loss of values, in the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, and protected England from going through the extremes of the French Revolution. Now each of these movements had their peculiarities and uniquenesses, but each of them grew up in times of frontier, industrial or other kinds of loss of heritage. And they returned from the vacuum to the scripture and vast numbers of people found themselves again.

Now my friends, in 1806 and again in 1809, two gentlemen, being concerned about the disruption as they, in one case, migrated from Scotland, the disruption of the different kinds of people on the frontier, the disunity of the church, the haphazard way of life, the low morals, went to the scripture. One of those persons' name was Barton W. Stone. Another was Thomas Campbell, shortly joined by his son, Alexander Campbell. These men concluded, each in their separate ways, that the answer to man's dilemma was to rediscover his heritage through the Bible. Through studying and

reading of the Bible. And both of them launched movements, all three of them, which subsequently coalesced into a movement known as Disciples of Christ, or Christian Church. Those early leaders rediscovering the heritage of Christianity were not just content to read it in English, they went back to the original, to Greek and Hebrew. And it was not unusual to find an ordinary farmer walking behind a plow, a single plow, with a Greek New Testament balanced on the cross piece between the handles of that plow, learning his Bible in Greek.

Such was their interest and desire, to rediscover and repossess the heritage from God Almighty. This movement became at times, and in certain parts of this country, the most rapidly growing movement. It stressed that man was not depraved or deprived. That man was a rationale being in the traditions of John Lock. That religion and Christianity was reasonable. That God was not an irrational person. And that man, by studying and applying his mind to the scripture, could know what the heritage was and could get guidance and he needed not to have a Pope, or even theologians to tell him what to know and what to believe. That in plain and simple words, there a man could find out what the morality should be between men and what ethics should be in the actions of men. Such was their faith that persons came, intelligent, educated, simple, uneducated persons, gathered together. They need not have even church buildings. They met in homes and cabins and camp meetings. And they studied the Bible and they became known as the Bible people. Many people almost feared to take them on in controversy, because they knew their Bibles so well. And they carried their Bibles with them and they read them. The beginning of the day, the end of the day, the middle of the day, at work or at play.

Certainly it was the custom and the habit to read and to teach the young in the home. This is a movement that rejected any extremes. That rejected the personality cult and strove mightily to restore, in its simplicity, the early Christian experience of obedience to God. They believed that one should study to show themselves approved of God and not approved of men. These Bible experts were your forefathers. They're the ones who hoped that they were passing on to you the Biblical heritage. How have you received it? Do you know it? Are you passing it on to your young? Do you know anything about the Bible? Does it say anything about man? Do you know that in the 8th Psalm, there's something that says, "What is man, that thou are mindful of him?" A little later it says, "For Thou has made him a little lower than God."

Does it say anything about social relations? Does it say anything like, do unto others as you would, that they should do unto you? Or does it say, love God with everything that you have and your neighbor as yourself? Is that in the Bible?

Does it say anything about man's destiny? Does it say anything like, "I saw a new Heaven and a new earth?" Continuing on in later verses it says, "That there shall be built a Tabernacle of God and that God will dwell with men and they shall dwell with Him." Do you know that? That's in the Bible. It's in the book of Revelations and you've heard it, the 21st chapter, many times. But do you really know it or are they just shibboleths that bounce off your ears in sermons, in funerals and other occasions?

Does it say anything about God's relationship to man? Does it say anything like, "For God so loved the world." What? "That He gave His only Begotten Son." The Sunday School verse we used to learn. "That whosoever believeth might not perish, but have eternal life." Does it say anything about, "Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart. And you will find rest unto your soul."

What a comforting thought. In the time of stress and worry and burden, when family relationships among your children are breaking up. When the job is not going right. When the pension doesn't go far enough. When we get all uptight. Do we remember to go back to the scripture and receive the knowledge of a pension, which can never be bought by our savings. Receive the knowledge of a family that can never be severed by man's fickleness. Does the word of God, does the Bible say anything about man's style of living? Does it say something about "the fruits of the Spirit being love and joy and peace and long suffering and kindness and goodness and faithfulness and meekness and self-control?"

What a program, what a pattern for living, yet we pay thousands of dollars in bills to psychiatrists and psychologists to try to bring us into that kind of condition. Even more to the pharmacists to try to tranquilize us into that kind of condition. There's our medicine? Yes, if you want to know about the style of living which we're living, go ahead and read the verses just before that and I won't even recite them, but oh are they a description of the style of life of people who no longer have their heritage.

The Fourth of July is upon us and during this time, we symbolically remember the patriotism of the past and hope to extend the patriotism of the present. My friends, the true heritage from our founding fathers was the Bible. They were men of the Bible. Whatever their peculiar religious affiliation, they believed in God. They believed in the providence of God, that He'd led them to this moment. And there's no way we can recapture national integrity, a sense of patriotism, respect for the flag, law and order, until there is a sufficient leaven of persons who have recaptured the true heritage of America and for all men, and that's the Bible.

If you would make the fourth of July significant this year and for years to come, do not stock up on six-packs for the picnic. Put the Bible in its place and let there be a reading of scripture. Even as Josiah ordered to be read to his people as he gathered them together so that the nation might be purged and reunited. As you think about the return to the study of the Bible, the necessity to say Amen, if you weren't so inhibited to what I'm saying. Do not think, well our preachers need to preach more Bible. Do not think well, why can't we do more about the Bible?

Forget about the other person and think about yourself and say, what am I doing? You may have taught Sunday School for 30 years. But what recently have you done to significantly sit down, even without helps, and just read, again and again. For the knowledge, for the instruction, and for the comfort. No, if we should rediscover our heritage, it'll be only because you and I pledge ourselves at this moment, that we shall have a personal confrontation with the heritage of our forefathers via the Bible. Then we shall continue to expand this in our own family in reading and teaching together. Then by the quality of our lives, leaven the lives of others. Too often in the rediscovery of the Bible we discover one doctrine. And then we go out and we try to preach this doctrine at other people. The best way to evangelize, my folks, is to let the Bible speak through your life, so that there is no inconsistency or little inconsistency. People will come to say, what is it that gives you peace? What is it that gives you happiness, when you're in the same circumstances that I am? Then when they say, what is it, you can say, I know the Lord Jesus Christ through His word.

For the rediscovery of our heritage is not the reading of words in an ancient text, but the revelation to man of God's love of him and is coming in the form of his Son, to make possible your salvation. When one accepts that fact, that God has taken the initiative to show his love, then one has the power to respond in love, to God with all His heart and soul and strength and the power also to love his neighbor as himself.

How do You Know A Christian When You See One
Boone Christian Church
Summer mid1980s
Scripture Matt. 23:1-28

What do you think it would look like if you could turn yourself inside out? What kind of Christian would we really be, if we were stripped of the clothes of our social image and really revealed for what we truly are.

This is exactly what Jesus did to the religious leadership of his day. The teachers, the scribes and the Pharisees were the leaders. They were the personification of the devout. The priests, along with them, were the ones who held up before the people what it was like to be a true child of Israel, a true member of the covenant with God. They were careful in their dress. They were careful in their diet. They were careful in their manner of speaking religiously and they were careful to play their role before men so that they would receive the proper respect, greetings and salutations. But perfect appearances may beget a lie. A person truly being what they are may not be seen, because we look at people with pre-conceived images as to what they should be.

Thus, we misidentify the truly Christian. We make those who are Christian seem to be just like ordinary folk and we make some extraordinary folk seem to be extraordinary Christians. Long or short hair, perfect grooming or ill-kept clothes, do not necessarily mean much when it comes to what the basic condition within of what a person is.

The latest model car, the best in color TV does not necessarily indicate the economic condition of a family. How often it has been my lot, and you have seen it too, to go on a mission or an errand of mercy, into a portion of a city or a community where there dwell the less fortunate and to see beside a tumble-down shack a used Cadillac and an antenna for color TV. Now we say to ourselves, oh my, such hypocrisy. It's their small way of compensating for the fact that they cannot live according to the image of success. So they reach out, not furtively but overtly, for some of the symbols of American success. So it is that such people reach for the Cadillac and the color TV.

There are many of us who do the same thing religiously. The pious phrase, the appearances at the proper services, the other accoutrements of office, to say to the public that we are Christian. In fact, if we read the scripture somewhat sensitively, one is almost intimidated, as Jesus criticizes the religious leaders of his day. Intimidated, I say, as to whether we want to ever be involved in a leadership position in the church. We know that we cannot stand close examination. We know that hypocrisy is even the unintentional

posture of the virtuous. We know that we have a problem of misleading others, because they look at us as being giants and virtuous people and religious and deeply concerned about God's work. They may find out, and they do find out, that within us is an Achilles heel, a weak link in the chain, stretched, taut to breaking the point. In seeing this, how easy it is to wipe out not only the person that we are in their minds but also to wipe out the causes that we espouse.

That's the reason Jesus said, "These people sit on Moses' seat. Listen to them and obey what they teach. But don't do as they do." But what are some of the indicators of a Christian? What are some of the concerns and ways of life, in which we must be involved, even though we never perfect our Christianity, but being involved will help us constantly reappraise ourselves and enable ourselves to come closer to the mark of the high calling.

The first thing I would say is that in keeping the law of man and of God must result in regard for others. It is not enough to be righteous, if that righteousness destroys our love for our fellow man. It is not enough to be vindictive in terms of bringing about judgment, if in that process we kill the souls of our fellows. I'm not saying one keeps close to the edge legally, in relationship to the law. Easy come, easy go. No, a Christian keeps the law. Keeps the law, spirit and letter, but keeps it in such fashion that they do not, from a perch of self-righteousness, look down upon those around them. Or vindictively lay the lashes on the person who is sentenced to lashes. The Christian keeps the law, with mercy, with forgiveness, with understanding, in relationship to others. On those moments when the Christian stumbles and falls, prays to God that those about him may say, we love the work and the goals of our fellow and we pray for the strengthening of that one.

So a Christian is one who lives with the law as his guide and upholds it and keeps it, but lives with his fellows with tenderness and mercy, to enable them better to uphold it and keep it.

A Christian, furthermore, is one who does not try to have it all here and expect it all there.

Jesus gave us a rather vivid and harsh example, when he told the story of Dives and Lazarus. The rich man who died and went to heaven and the judgment was such that he was sent down to suffer and as he was suffering, dying of thirst, yet not dying, he looked up and he saw in heaven Lazarus, the beggar, who had eaten crumbs from his table and fought with the dogs for the remains now sitting in the bosom of Abraham. In his misery, the rich man called up and said, Abraham, please send my servant down with some moisture for me and then he learned he'd had it all tin life and he couldn't have it all in the afterlife.

There was a pointed aspect there, and I don't know whether you read this or not, but then Dives thinks in terms of all his relatives, and particularly, five brothers who are still down on earth living it up. There you see Dives, we don't know the rest of it, but he's very concerned about his brothers, and he asks Abraham to send Lazarus down as a messenger to my brothers and tell them the fix he is in, so that they can straighten themselves out. The reply, no that won't do any good. We've had prophets. We've had all sorts of teachers and scripture and all sorts of advice to you and to your brothers. You've had the messenger of God himself, even Jesus Christ. If they won't listen to them, they won't listen to Lazarus, they won't believe him.

No, a Christian is one who lives as a pilgrim and who does not get caught up in the material things of life. He gets caught up in stewardship under God. Works hard. Is provident. Is careful and thrifty. He invests well. But not with the idea of acquiring material goods in order to satisfy the consumer urge. The Christian knows that the supreme goal is the privilege of accepting God's grace and residing with Him. So the Christian doesn't try to have it all here and expect it all there. The Christian, furthermore, accepts the invitation to dine with God whenever it comes, under whatever the circumstances. You know, we put off the invitations to dine with God in this life. We keep saying, well tomorrow, or another time. The church can come in the margin.

There's another story, too, in the scriptures of people who were invited to a feast and they didn't come, so who came? People from the alleys and the byways, the beggars and the dispossessed. Then all too late, when a person suddenly comes to and says, "Well this is an important banquet, everybody's going to be there, that's something, I better get there." The gates are closed.

How busy we get in this life. So busy that God's feast itself is missed. The Christian is one who puts first things first and does not, under any circumstance allow his habit pattern to be such and his whole style of life, that God gets the edge only occasionally.

God is first. His church is the process by which the Christian serves his fellows. Young people, especially find this so tempting. Particularly when they go away to college. They get involved in all the college activities and all the courtship routines. The church suffers and God takes a backseat. In fact, he doesn't even take a backseat. He's pushed out of the car.

Furthermore, a Christian lives under a single standard. He does not expect of others what he does not expect of himself. This is pretty much what another scripture reference says, "Don't judge others, so that God will not judge you."

Because God will judge you in the same way you judge others and He will apply to you the same rules you apply to others."

How easy it is for us to stand off and ask, "Well what's going on?" Well, my friends, I'm not excusing Watergate in the least, but I've never seen such a spate of self-righteous journalism in my life. Yet, I know journals and not the least is one that all Iowa depends upon, whose main purpose seems to be controversy.

I want to say a Congress that is working over the Executive branch, might well examine its heart, because Watergate began when the people of America tried to have guns and butter. When we developed the immoral posture of fighting a war without declaring it, which is Congress's prerogative. However the Executive may have manipulated, back under previous regimes, it was Congress's prerogative.

We practiced deceit upon ourselves when we went into Vietnam and we sacrificed thousands and thousands of lives and shattered others, because we were not moral enough to apply to ourselves the price of a real declaration of war. That's when Watergate began and you and I sat back here and elected that Congress and gleefully took the increase in wages and the relatively full employment and the other kinds of growing consumerism, guns and butter.

Because a nation at war should sacrifice we're going to. We're going to pay the fiddler. The bills are coming due. That's where Watergate began, in the crossroad communities in America and that's where it is today. Don't say, oh, isn't it too bad our nation's capital. My friends, look in the mirror. Where will it end? Not by some show hearings and some court trials and some sentencing. It will only end when you look in the mirror and apply to yourself the judgments that you're applying to others. A Christian lives under a single standard.

My friends, the greater the difference between expectancy and fulfillment in our lives, the greater the misleading, which we, as Christians, give to others. Those are awful standards, aren't they? What do we do? Do we remain poor and spend all of our time in spiritual practice and meditating? Do we go to church every time we can and never expect anything of any others? Do we refuse to judge? Do we absolutely go into neutral, as far as this life is concerned?

No, my friends, it's a matter of balance. Keeping life in proportion. Not caricaturing religion, not creating a monster from our occupation in which we are working. Not causing the world to revolve around ourselves, but rather a

balance between our existence as ego, as person and our relationship in society, and our relationship, the third leg on this tripod, with God.

This is the uniqueness of the spiritual human being, is that one has the relative freedom to balance all of these relationships. There's a certain relaxation, in a spiritual relationship, to God's work. We're not alone in this. It is not expected that one of us has to do it all. Just as the farmer prepares the ground and plants the seed and tills and harvests it, he still has to let the plant grow. The Christian accepts the fact that the Kingdom of God is like a man who scatters seed in his field. He sleeps at night and is up and about during the day, and all the while the seeds are sprouting and growing, yet he does not know how it happens.

The soil itself makes the plants grow and bear fruit. First, the tender stalk and then the head and finally, the ripened grain. For you see, God is our partner in this life. We don't have to do everything. All we need to do is be sensitive and alert as a spiritual creature, so that the focusing of our eyes, the cocking of our ears, the sensitivity of our smell, the dilation of our nostrils, the discrimination of our taste, spiritually directs our life into partnership with God.

You turn a Christian inside out and what do you find? A person. A person who increasingly strives to look the same inside with his outside. Why? Because God stands in for our weakness, for our sin. For God, through his Son, makes up the difference. All I can say to a Christian is, if you want to tell the difference, you'll find the person with all of his hypocrisy, with all of his difficulties, who is striving mightily to accept God's gift. You can't do it yourself. You can't will to be virtuous. You can't have all the earth and have it too. It's not possible. No person can bring himself to the place where he can be God himself.

How can you tell a Christian when you see one? A Christian is one with gratefulness and happiness. Accepts from God the full gift of salvation and says, God, take me and use me. Chastise me and guide me. Each day he rises to a new day in God's world and God's work. Each night he reclines, laying before God his difficulties, his problems, his weaknesses. For God has forgiven, chastening and strengthening, so that on the next morning he may rise again, to be about God's work.

Seek first the Kingdom of God and all such for which you may have need will be supplied to you. How do you tell the difference, or how do you tell a Christian when you see one? You tell a Christian when you see one, by observing that he is dependent upon God, filled with the Spirit and producing the fruits of the spirit.

May you all here in this congregation study your scriptures thoroughly, pray hard and continuously, and work always to be Christian.

From Whence We Came
Wakonda Christian Church
March 22, 1998

Scripture: Acts 2:37-42

Intro: The subject today has to do with us - the Disciples of Christ - the Wakonda Christian Church. A bit of information before we begin- Did you know that three of our nation's presidents were members of the Christian Church? Two of them were shot, one fatally early in his term of office. One was an Ohio preacher, evangelist and educator of the Christian Church. One was a Texas school teacher and grew up in a Christian Church and one was a radio announcer, actor who not only grew up in a Christian church but also graduated from an Illinois Christian Church College. In a recent presentation of the life of the actor president his religious background was presented as "fundamentalist." In the few minutes we have together I hope to show you a different picture of the Disciples.

Now, I want you to close your eyes (maybe not, you might go to sleep on me, but I'll take a chance). Close your eyes and transport yourself back to the late seventeen hundreds and the early eighteen hundreds. It was a time when our nation was just beginning its independent existence, an existence that was not really conceded by Britain until after the war of 1812. This was a time when there was no electricity, no telephone, no television, no airplanes, no automobiles, and no indoor plumbing by and large. It was a time before the poor, blacks and women had the vote. Travel was by foot, horse, boat or imagination. Heat and cooking was by stove or even fireplace and the fuel was mainly wood, also some coal locally dug. There were no electric dishwashers or washing machines, no supermarkets, Walmarts, Younkers, or Walgreens to buy clothes and other necessities, no frozen meals except in the winter time.

But there was religion. All sorts of faiths, sects and cults. Because there was no official religion in the United States as there was back in Europe anything was allowed except human sacrifice. Back across the Atlantic most nations had an official religion and tolerance of others barely existed. To deviate from the norm could bring imprisonment or banishment, -indeed, even death in the century before.

Shortly after the beginning of Christianity there were differences of opinion and sides would be chosen. The side that got the support of the state

would vigorously put down the other side. A monopoly of the religious point of view led to corruption and the need for reform. One of the more successful was the Protestant Reformation. This reforming temper had been intensified by the influences of the renaissance, the age of enlightenment and the growth of the mercantile and middle classes. Philosophers such as John Locke and the Scottish philosophical School of Common Sense all helped to heighten an awareness of the human potential in contrast to the theological doctrine that the human being was damned and had no virtue even before he was born. There was also a growing belief that for religion to be creditable it must be subject to the laws of reason and rational discourse. This reforming brew which throughout the history of Christianity was always fermenting came to fruition in America.

In this new country, the early United States, even with all varieties of religion from which to choose only one in twenty persons was affiliated with a church. Frontier life could be pretty raw. It still was assumed, however, that the nation and its basic culture was Christian and predominately Protestant. Imported from the old country were, however, religious quarrels and customs that had no relevance in the new world. Many persons particularly clergy were fed up with all the theological hurdles and bureaucratic barricades that were being substituted for a genuine religious life and which were dividing Christians from each other.

Almost simultaneously persons in different parts of settled America came to the idea that they could go back to the Bible, particularly the New Testament and restore Christianity to the way it was originally practiced and thus bring unity to God's people. At the same time traveling preachers began to preach to the unchurched and great masses of people like today's Billy Graham meetings gathered in open fields and became crazed on religion like youth today at a rock concert.

The big question was how were Christians going to become united and how could democracy function in the control of the local congregation. In New England Elias Smith and Abner Jones preached "back to the Bible" sermons and called themselves not Presbyterians, Methodists, Lutherans, Congregationalists, Baptists or Episcopalians, just Christians. In the Carolinas, a couple of Methodists, James O'Kelly and Rice Haggard, turned away from the tight control of the Methodist bishops and returning to Biblical norms called themselves Christians. In Virginia a group of Presbyterian ministers broke all synodical and presbyterial connections and called themselves Christians. From this group Barton Stone is one to remember.

Up in Western Pennsylvania two Presbyterian ministers, father and son, Thomas and Alexander Campbell gathered a group of like minded persons around them and went back to the Bible to rediscover a way to restore the New Testament practice of Christianity. In New York were the Henry Errett family and a person by name of Walter Scott who were influenced by English and Scottish reform activities started back in Great Britain by evangelists with

names like Glas, Haldane, Sandeman, and Ewing. Scott, the Erretts and many others joined the movement started by the Campbells. These people called themselves Disciples of Christ and their churches either Christian Churches or Churches of Christ. In Virginia, Kentucky and Ohio most of the Christians led by Stone united in 1830 with the Campbell movement.

The words of Thomas Campbell in his "Declaration and Address" pretty well summarized the grievances and proposals of these "reforming" groups. In this document were thirteen propositions. I give you the first three for you to ponder as you think of where you are in your own religious pilgrimage. They are:

1. The church of Christ is "essentially, intentionally and constitutionally one."
2. Local churches ought to be in mutual fellowship, "to receive each other. . . to mind and speak the same thing."
3. Nothing ought to be taught as articles of faith or required as terms of communion that is not expressly taught in God's Word.

The rest of the thirteen are equally worthy of consideration but we have not time this morning to be more thorough.

As these groups went back to the New Testament to rediscover the pattern of worship of the first Christians as well as their religious practice, they not only found out about believers baptism and weekly communion but they also found out about washing feet and the kiss of peace. In more than one church the elders became concerned about the tendency of the unmarried youth to sit together so they could participate with each other in a lengthy kiss of peace. So it was ruled that only married folks could kiss the unmarried. Single girls could kiss each other and single boys each other. That took some of the fun out of religion, didn't it?

In the mean time many Disciple evangelists were preaching across the country enlisting converts and proselytizing from other denominations. Such evangelists included Raccoon John Smith who baptized hundreds and as he said also "capsized hundreds of Baptists" by convincing them to join up with the Christians.

Many arguments and even great debates were enjoined as folks disputed religious views using the Bible as their main authority. The story is told that a Disciple minister and a Methodist minister were riding together heavily debating their respective points of view. The Disciple was really afflicting the Methodist by quoting Scripture at him. They got caught in a thunderstorm and thoroughly wet they stopped at a local inn for shelter. The inn keeper feeling sorry for them offered each a glass of wine to warm their bodies. With some reluctance about drinking alcoholic beverages they felt that it would be rude of them to refuse the drink so they both agreed to participate. Whereupon the Disciple minister lifted his drink and downed it. The Methodist minister, pointing his finger, said, "Ah! you say you follow the Bible, what about I Thessalonians 5:18 which says "In everything give thanks:". Where upon the

Methodist bowed his head and piously folded his hands and gave forth with a long prayer not only thanking the Lord for the kindness of their host but also for the salvation of all within the sound of his voice and particularly he asked the Lord to enable his companion, the Disciple minister, to read and study his Bible aright. You may be sure that all in the tavern were aware of the contest going on between these two men of faith. However, during the long prayer the Disciple minister reached across and took his companion's drink and drank it. When the Methodist minister opened his eyes to enjoy his drink realizing what had happened he started to berate his companion for doing such a dastardly deed. But the Disciple interrupted him by saying, "You have forgotten Matthew 26: 41 where it says 'Watch and pray'." Not all religious disputes were as "picky" as that but they could become intense.

Walter Scott, a very successful evangelist, used a five finger exercise to teach the principles of New Testament Christianity and the process of conversion. He won many converts. His five finger exercise was as follows: The thumb represented faith, the first finger repentance, the third finger baptism, the fourth finger remission of sins and the fifth the gift of the holy spirit. Hold up your hand and let's practice this conversion outline-- faith, repentance, baptism, remission of sins, and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Scott's formula for conversion was later elaborated on by James Garfield in his plan of salvation which included six evils besetting mankind and six cures for those evils.

The goal was the unity of Christians not just because it would be a good thing to have Christians all nicely unified but because it was held that a divided Christianity could not effectively proclaim the Christian message. The goal was not unity as such but only as the means to the main objective which was the conversion of all the people of the world. The power of the Gospel would compel the convert to spread the New Testament message "that the loving father God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son who after a time of ministry and recruiting followers died on the cross. He, also, rose from the grave for mankind's salvation. The conclusion of the message was that whoever believed in Jesus as their savior would have the promise of eternal life and as a practical consequence the guidance of the Holy Spirit to enable one to live a proper life on this earth.

This was called "proclaiming the Gospel." One didn't have to go through a lot of catechism, or horrendous emotional experiences to become a Christian. One having become convinced by reading Scripture and or by the testimony of other Christians needed only make a confession of ones faith and be baptized by immersion. New life in Christ would be nourished by at least weekly participation in the Lords Supper. The convert would join a congregation of fellow Christians with equal status and as a lay person be qualified to baptize others and to serve at the Lord's Table. However, ones main duty was to witness to others of the love of God and to practice that love with one's neighbor. So evangelism was the main focus for these Christians.

This meant that new Christians convinced their family, neighbors, and others with whom they were associated in the community to join with them in this great salvific experience

Now open your eyes and come back to 1998. The message that they proclaimed is still relevant for today. You see it isn't enough just to nourish each other as fellow members. It isn't enough to do good works for others. You "gotta do what you gotta do" and that is evangelism, -indirectly by the example of your life out in society and directly by talking to others and bringing them to Christ. Are you so grateful to God for what he has done for you that your faith boils over and causes you to win others for Christ, or do you hold that the ministers are hired to get new members for the church? No, the main task of Christians assembled in a congregation is to bring others to Christ and lead them to the cleansing waters of baptism and then into the fellowship of the church.

This is what you joined when you joined this church. This is the tradition of which you are a part. You are a part of a democratically controlled program administered by your ministers and staff and run by your elected officials. Yes, this congregation exists for the nourishment of its members but it exists mainly to proclaim evangelically the salvation afforded to all persons so they may come to know the love of God through Christ.

Next Sunday is "bring a friend Sunday." You are invited to bring your friends not only into a wonderful fellowship but also into a redeeming experience. In the Christian church the worship service includes an invitation to any in the congregation who have not accepted Jesus as their savior or who do not now have a church home to come forward during the singing of the invitation hymn and be received by the elders of the church for the purpose of accepting Christ and establishing a church home. So on behalf of Christ and this congregation I invite any here today who want to accept Christ or who want a church home to come forward as we sing the hymn of invitation.

I Believe
Wakonda Christian Church,
August 20, 1989

Scripture: Mark 9:14-24

I. Introduction:

A. Opening remarks

B. To believe is fundamental to our very existence. Our behavior, our relationships are based on our beliefs. The trust we have in others, in our community and indeed in our nation depends upon what we believe about each of those entities. If we say, "I don't believe it," or, "It's hardly believable," it is a tactful way of saying, "I don't believe you." "You can't believe anything he says," is a judgement about a person's character and a warning about trusting that person. When a wife says to her husband, "Look me straight in the eye and say that again," she might as well have said right out, "I don't believe you," or even more bluntly, "You are a liar!"

The word, "belief " comes from Anglo-Saxon and is defined as a persuasion of the truth or the accent of the mind to the truth based on evidence which comes not so much from ones personal experience as from testimony from other sources. The credibility of the witness determines the strength of ones belief.

The sum of ones beliefs pretty much determines the Credo or creed of that person. Most of our beliefs just seem to accumulate and together are not logically arranged and seldom examined. Much of ones beliefs may indeed be myths that seem necessary in order to cope. About persons, situations, even ones government we don't really want to know the truth and find it necessary to go on believing a myth in order to cope. In fact if persons would really lay their beliefs side by side and compare them they would see that they may cancel each other out. Some one has said that an unexamined life is not worth living. Yet myth , believing something to be true for which one does not have hard evidence or even when there is evidence to the contrary seems necessary for many. It is that which makes life more palatable. A little bit of sugar makes the medicine go down.

Beliefs are the foundation stones on which one builds ones life. In the scripture this morning Jesus made the assertion that all things are possible to him who believes. "Believes what?" is the important question.

II. What I believed when young.

A. Personal life

As I thought about this sermon I thought about some of my beliefs, particularly those that I held as a younger person. Basic was the belief that the body was the temple of God and therefore one should sleep, exercise and eat properly. One should go to bed early and rise early and one should prepare for sleep by saying ones prayers. One should if possible get their exercise through expending effort which resulted in some constructive work. My grandfather could never see riding a bicycle or playing golf. Riding a bicycle was just sitting down to walk and running around a pasture beating up on a little ball was effort that could be more productively expended cleaning the manure out of the horse barn. I suppose that if all the running and walking I see going by my house were placed on a tread mill attached to a generator we could light up the South side. In eating, one was to eat what was set before them and be thankful for something to eat. There was to be no desert if the "vegies"weren't eaten. One ate to live, not lived to eat. In the diet were to be no drugs or stimulants including caffeine, nicotine, or alcohol.

Cleanliness was next to Godliness. This meant bathing at least every Saturday night, changing from school clothes to play or work clothes as soon as one got home from school, brushing teeth regularly, keeping nails clean and pared, and hair combed. One was to adorn oneself modestly and not attract attention. The body was beautiful and was to be maintained full of grace so that full mental and physical effort could be expended for the accomplishment of worthy goals. No part of the human anatomy was ugly or bad and had, properly used, a balanced satisfaction to bestow.

One was to give a full days work for a full days pay and conversely one gave a full days pay for a full days work. One gave full measure, shaken down and running over and one did not go into debt, purchasing only for what one could pay. One did not engage in business which did not result in the increase of worthwhile products or services or which caused many to lose so that a few could gain. This included not gambling which meant raffles, bingo, personal bets, lotteries and betting on horse racing, games, and cards.

One was to help the weak in such fashion as to restore them to independence and certainly not to satisfy ones own ego and superiority. Differences in gender, race, class, or religion should not give advantage to one person over another. Public and private property was to be respected. Don't litter, clean up your own mess or at least keep it in your own yard. God's earth was to be preserved and nature was not be be despoiled, for that which despoiled nature despoiled humanity as well.

Another's privacy was to be respected and gossip was forbidden. Yet, one should see and report lawbreaking after trying, if possible and safe, to turn others away from law breaking.

One should regularly examine ones occupation to determine whether what was being done was necessary and contributed to the sum total of human goodness and welfare.

B. Beliefs About Public Life:

There were other beliefs as well that pertained more to public life. Persons in professions and in public life were servants of the people and should not use office, position, or title for extracting large personal gain. Charity began at home. Vagrancy, truancy, malingering, idleness were not worthy pursuits and not to be endured by society because they destabilized the community. No generation should live so as to deprive the next generation. God's earth was sacred and to be preserved. It was not to be despoiled in the processes of the production of human goods. Yet no land was so "holy" that human beings must be sacrificed. The earth belongs to all and not to any.

Government may regulate but should not encroach into the private sector and certainly not sponsor vice. Public expenditures should be limited and be financially solvent. Even the government should not buy that for which it could not pay. A nation's voice and actions echoed and rippled around the world touching for good or evil all inhabitants. Government of the people by the people and for the people requires constant vigilance lest it become government of officers, by bureaucrats, and for legislative incumbents. The best government was the least necessary.

Fraud, deceit, or flimflamming should not be used in business, in selling or in contracting. Advertising should be limited to describing the product or services and should not be linked to other human desires or to human achievement not brought about by the use of the product. Wealth accumulated represented a stewardship to be used for human advancement and not for personal squandering or exploitation of others.

III. Beliefs about Religion:

A. About God:

I was taught to believe that God was for real and that He sent Himself in human form, namely in Jesus of Nazareth to teach us about God's nature and His desires for us. This included how one was to carry out their stewardship on earth. I was taught that in accepting God's loving act through Jesus one accepted the mantle of discipleship, namely carrying on the work that Jesus was doing. This involved sacrifice and even the possibility of death, but it also meant that one through God's power could be effective in bringing about the age of peace and love on earth and share in eternal life. I believed that every person has direct access to the power of God and needed no human intermediaries. I believed that the love of God is verified by love of neighbor and that God did not declare any group or class of human beings as inferior and did not support holy wars.

B. Religious Practice:

I understood that prayer to God was real, efficacious and belonged to the people and not to the clergy, and certainly not to radio and T.V. personalities and no one should be paid to pray for another. Clergy were not paid to be religious or to make possible another's religion but to conduct the affairs of a congregation and to serve the human needs of its members according to his or her skills and understanding. The clergy's role was to teach so that the members might progress religiously and at any one time in his or her life the clergy might not be closer to God than other members of the congregation. A congregation existed as a community of the concerned to sustain its members, to be exemplary persons, gathered or dispersed, and to focus concerted effort to leaven its communities' social and spiritual health. Do you know that most of the people of the churches in which I grew up also believed the same things. Do you also know that I still believe them.

IV. Conclusion:

A. Basic Uncertainty:

I hear increasingly today, "I don't know what to believe or whom to trust". When that condition or frame of mind begins to dominate a society a vacuum develops like the empty house that fills with demons. . Those demons become dogmatic personalities who rise up and claim the loyalties of persons who no longer want to think for themselves but want to be told the answers, persons who want someone to say follow me and I will take you from this morass and put down your enemies. I will make your nation great again. Such persons with popular following seize power very often in the name of religion or at least an ultimate ideology. Hitler and Stalin are examples in recent history. We have had and do have politicians who would lead in the same way. They build up fiefdoms and the people believe they have the answers and can do no wrong. Most scandalous, however, are the persons who in the name of God claim followings which extract the wealth and even the lives of their followers.

B. The Answer:

The answer to such peril is for each person to assume responsibility for their own spiritual health and to seek personally to understand what God can do for them. Such a quest requires self examination to determine whether we believe anything anymore and what we believe. Actually one to live must have beliefs. Even the devil, scripture says, believes that God exists. Actually we have good and bad beliefs. Doubt and inability to live up to our good beliefs by default leaves the bad beliefs dominant. At the very least unexamined beliefs leave us with internal conflict between our beliefs. We live as though our right and left hands need not know what each is doing. This can lead to

lack of coordination, lack of focus and a personality in conflict and impotence. Beliefs must be consciously sorted out and conflict recognized so that which enervates and restricts action can be overcome.

Jesus said to the father of the epileptic, "All things are possible to him who believes". Earlier we asked the question, "Believes what"? The answer is, "Belief in the availability of the power of God". If we really believed that the experience Jesus had of God's Power was also for us then our lives would be built around at least these five convictions, that God exists, that the power of God is love, that life under the power of God requires action, that in the very nature of God's creation is evaluation or judgment. and that life in God is eternal. Nothing is so sure, permanent, or reliable as God. He can be trusted.

Our Condition:

We live most of the time as if we didn't need to trust God except in times of crisis. Sidney Lanier in a poem wrote of standing at the temple door with heart in and head out. We are split personalities. We are self confident and like to feel we are self sufficient. When adversity strikes us we think the world has turned against us and in turn we turn against our loved ones. Those who would be closest to us. Even if things are going pretty well for us, down underneath we worry that a "take-over" will cost us our jobs, that changing interest rates will lower our income, that our bodies are not behaving the way they should, that a disease is secretly working within us, that our children may be in trouble, that the next ring of the phone will bring bad news, that the desire to possess has brought financial over commitment. We go to church, endorse and support good causes, yet the peace that passes understanding escapes us. We believe, yet we need help for our unbelief. We are of little faith. To believe is to trust. The opposite of trust is worry. Complete trust casts out fear, worry, anxiety, and stumbling about in life.

D. The Solution:

Jesus taught that God was a loving father standing close by each of us. One might wonder who could reject the concern of a loving father. Yet with God waiting to help and serve us we are loathe to accept His love. We are of little faith or we limit the manifestation of God to romantic moments when out of our momentary euphoria we see him in nature. God is known not just by the majesty of his creation but directly through His Spirit. One may follow the forms of religious practice, give accent to statements of doctrine and still have an unsatisfying or even dead faith. God's love or Spirit, indwelling, brings our beliefs into focus and makes our faith come alive. The Holy Spirit or

Comforter which Jesus promised to his disciples is also available to us today to give us the power to believe and live the life of a Christian steward.

Belief is validated by a faith in operation which is made strong and living in love. Anselm, a theologian of the 11th century in his *Monologium*, chapter lxxvii, wrote:

"For, that the faith which is accompanied by sufficient love is by no means idle, if an opportunity of operation offers, but rather exercises itself in an abundance of works, as it could not do without love, may be proved from this fact alone, that, since it loves the supreme Justice, it can scorn nothing that is just, it can approve nothing that is unjust. Therefore, seeing that the fact of its operation shows that life, without which it could not operate, is inherent in it; it is not absurd to say that operative faith is alive, because it has the life of love without which it could not operate; and that idle faith is not living, because it lacks that life of love, with which it would not be idle."

A living faith cleanses the heart, fully dominates the mind and directs ones conduct. I believe now it can be said with certitude, ones unbelief does not paralyze but is kept in check by the love of God working in our hearts keeping us active in working for a world of peace and love for all inhabitants of this orb, knowing that we are doing God's will and not our own, following his plans for our lives and not our own, and passing to the next generations the challenge to keep building God's, Kingdom.

Freedom From Fear
Covenant Christian Church
June 7, 1987

Scripture I John 4:7-19

It is not simple. It is difficult. One perfects the way of love by accepting the Gospel of love. Accepting into our lives the complete need of Jesus's Messiahship and by loving one another as fellow Christians, beginning here in Covenant Christian Church. We must acknowledge the crippling effect of old guilts and fears and accept the assurance that God knows better than we know ourselves who we are and He still loves us. This assurance should help to stifle our fears, but fears are really stifled by our increasing practice of love. Shakespeare in one of his plays, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, writes, "They do not love, who do not show their love." Another has written, "I should not know how to love the Lord, if He had not loved me. For who is able to distinguish love, except the One that is loved."

Emerson, in the conclusion of one of his poems writes, "He, God, His love broods over thee. Broods like a mother hen, tenderly, keeping the temperature up and the moisture level to the day of birth. And even then, carry, all through the growth period, broods openly."

We can love because God first loved us and loves us each day, every day of our lives. But the interesting thing is when we love, God is in us loving. John wrote, "God is love and we love because God first loved us." Love has all sorts of characteristics and qualities. It is patient. It is merciful. It is generous, it is forgiving and it is redemptive. These are just many of the adjectives that we glean from Jesus's teaching. Love is not wishy-washy or does it refuse to take a stand. Love gives firmness and mission to one's character. Love cannot be shared with other preoccupations. It cannot be rationed or given its time or season. Yet love is focused in its totality. It is not a general feeling of euphoria. It is centered in the love of the brethren, not in a love of the world.

Potentially, one loves all persons, in all walks of life, but not all the things they do or every thing they advocate. As long as evil and sin remain, love will entail risk and sacrifice, hardship and misunderstanding. In fact, paradoxically, loving may, at least initially, provoke misunderstanding, even hatred. Yet our source of love is so dependable and never completely expendable. God is understood to be holy and faithful and righteous, but He is best known as love. That is the source and to know God's love gives purpose and direction to one's life and gives one a sense of complete fulfillment. Christians ought to love God first and completely and on that basis will be able to love their neighbor. At the same time love of God is meaningless if it is not expressed in love of fellow persons.

Paul wrote, "We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him." He also wrote, "Owe no one anything, except to love one another." As a child I remember with fondness some of those first hymns. Love divine, all love excelling joy of Heaven to earth come down. Fix in us Thy humble dwelling, all life's faithful, mercy's crown.

Love, in all places, is to be found in the church. Loving a brethren does not mean just running around and hugging everybody, although that's good. It means persistent and consistent shouldering of duties and responsibilities with joy and fervor. It means learning the art of enlisting others and working together. It means constantly realizing that the Christian's power to love is not of his own, but God is in him, enabling him to love beyond human limits. Love, I might say "lovers" in the church, are patient with each other and even more so with those less experienced and whose zeal is not yet channeled and steadfast.

We would be free from fear. The formula is perfect, love casts out fear. Fear of anything human beings may inflict, fear of anything disease may bring, fear of Judgment Day. All that fear disappears in perfect love. God's love indwelling gives power and serenity, gives purpose and energy, and finally gives assurance that God himself, through His grace, gives forgiveness and final

acceptance. Do you remember the words, "Oh love, that wilt not let me go, I rest my weary self in Thee. I give Thee back the life I owe, and in thine oceans' depth it's flow may richer fuller be."

Following are two sermons selected from the many preached in my student ministry at The Christian Church in Humeston, Iowa during my first two years attending Drake University, which at the time was a leading center for the education of ministers and missionaries for the Christian Church, Disciples of Christ .

Christianity in a Changing Social Order
Humeston Christian Church 1935 (18th year and first ministry)¹

Scripture II Corinthians 8-9:15

What part does Christianity play in our social order, In the working of a social order ? I think we can agree that fellowship and individual freedom are the principles involved. These factors feature prominently in the lives of humankind today. To ensure the working of these principles something must be found to keep them in the right proportion.

Something must be found to overcome selfishness, the one thing which especially mars the working of this world. Now what is that quality, that divine gift, that will act as a moderator between our two principles, and will overcome the evil vested in selfishness. That divine quality is love. Man has come to know that only love can keep things balanced.

Now let us backtrack. We asked the question what part does Christianity play

in a social order. We set up two principles of a social order. We found that selfishness upsets the working of those principles and we found that love counteracts selfishness and causes these two principles to work.

Now let us connect love with Christianity.

Man has not only found out that love is the only thing but he has found out that love is not of the physical but rather of the moral and spiritual nature. The Latin word, "amour" treats of lustful love. Christ's concept of love has to do with charity. Christ taught that love can only be born of the Spirit so finally it is necessary to connect love and the spiritual world together. Let us go to the Scripture, I John 4:7 – 21 "Beloved let us love one another; for love is of God and everyone that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not, knoweth not God, for God is love."

Now where did we get the practical application of that love?

God gave his own personal ideal of love through Christ. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten son into the world that we might live through him. Here in is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us. Christianity is enduring because of the actual fact that Jesus came here and lived the life of fellowship filled with love.

We further get the practical application of love through this bit of Scripture "if a man says I love God, and hateth his brother he is a liar, for he that loves not his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment have we from him, that he who loveth God loves his brother also.

"My little children let us not love in word neither in tongue but in deed and in truth." So we have arrived at the tie up of Christianity and the social order. Now what connection does Christianity have with the changing social order.

Through the years great religious leaders have uttered words of condemnation for the various inequities of our social systems and the hardheaded realists have taken it all without flinching because they know no activity will result. All others of us who are more conscientious are frustrated because there is no way to satisfy our desires to express ourselves socially.

How can we remedy this? We can first start by giving a realistic interpretation of the love of God. It is true, as has been said by those of the world, that God's plan of salvation cannot be blueprinted. And we in spiritual terms find plans of social betterment indefinite and only temporal. Right there is where we make our blunder. We assume such ends of social betterment are irrelevant to the great end. To correct ourselves we must add to our generalities the practical goals to be achieved. We must transfer to earth what previous generations

have idealized in heaven. We must accomplish our task of "thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven" not merely mumble the words of a prayer. We must not separate our religion from our daily living. Christianity is life.

Christian experience is the realization of possible abilities proper to human nature, in mental, physical and social areas. It is not isolation but the holding of ideals of common good to be achieved and shared. Jesus did not make his program purely of himself but he proclaimed his society and called all persons to him to participate and fulfill that society. We have always had a difficulty in our living. We have the individual who seeks for private spiritual good and salvation while the rest of the world sinks and we have the individual who seeks for private economic gain and let's the rest of the world sink. To remedy that deficiency we must realize that the working of a social order and the betterment of our fellow men is accomplished only through the influence of Christianity, and the Christian life is only fulfilled through the working of the social order and applying "love thy neighbor as thyself"

Let us apply straight economics to our Christian principles and let us look at our social order now and let us see what changes might be necessary. let us first define some terms and give some rules. First wealth is created by society and society is the arbitrator of wealth. Wealth can be fully gained and shared only by cooperation and in common. Riches represent actual accumulation of power. It is impossible for all to be rich for one's gain is generally another's loss. Being rich is merely keeping the unequal balance in your favor. Christianity seeks for the common good and the salvation of all humankind

With these definitions in mind let us take our social order and look at it. It is called capitalism. Its primary aim is the earning of dividends no matter the situation or the way that they would earned - whether by lower wages, lower working conditions or whatever. On the other hand specialists are necessary to make the rules and apply them. But these so-called administrative heads should never forget that they in reality are servants to the people and not just to those who receive dividends.

Christ said "Not so shall it be among you, for whoever would be great among you shall become your servant".

Competition is another essential that our present system is built on. But the competitive system is devastating to things spiritual. It seeks gain at the other person's loss. Competing for individual riches must be replaced by cooperation in the creation of the common wealth. Man's duty is to produce wealth but man's sin is seeking riches. What man seeks he finds. If it is inequality he brings inequality with its booms and panics and depressions including child labor, war, moral degradation and the utter disregard for Christ's teachings.

But if man seeks equality by first cultivating his character by the individual freedom given him and also fellowship with his fellow men his actions being guarded by the love of Christ he will find equality. Today in reply to established ideas we are quoting Scriptures. To war we are saying "love your enemies." To social conditions we are saying "love thy neighbor as yourself." To all mankind we are saying "seek first the kingdom of God and all these things will be added to you."

These are all evidences of Christianity in the changing social order. Man through individual freedom and fellowship leavened by the love of God finds that Christianity and the social order can be one and the same and that the changes for better can be brought by the influence of Christianity.

From the Heights To the Depths

Humeston Christian Church

(Preached at 18 years of age in his first church).

Scripture: Matthew 4:1 – 18, 5:1 – 12, 8:1 – three, 17:1 – 18, 26:26 – 36
Mark 16:15 – 20

Have you ever climbed to some high point? What has been the sensation? One feels drawn apart, set off from the world. I would say closer to God. We live in a place which is not geographically fixed with mountains, but on that landscape across the sea where our Master lived there were mountains. How often we read of his contact with the mountains. So many times in his life he ascended to the heights and true to his mission he also descended to the depths – the depths of reality. This morning there are five particular times that he climbed to the heights that we shall study.

In all of Christ's contracts with the heights he seemed to put in some preparation. Remember how he went into the wilderness and fasted for 40 days and nights. Imagine going that long without any food and perhaps little to drink. It was during that time that the devil came and tempted him. First of all he asked him to turn stones into bread and secondly he had him climb to the pinnacle of the Temple and cast himself down and the third time he took him to an exceedingly high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world. The devil would give them to Jesus if he would only bow down and worship. Think of all the temptation in light of the fact that he had fasted for 40 days and nights. This would make him very susceptible to accepting the invitation from the devil but he withstood that temptation.

Would we have withstood that temptation. In light of that experience without food and drink I'm afraid too many of us would have not resisted. Too many of us are busy snatching up kingdoms of this world instead of laying in store for heaven.

How did the master answer? He said "thou shalt worship the Lord thy God and him only shalt thou serve."

Jesus faced reality, what an experience, what a height to climb to, and then what did he do but came down to begin his earthly task. He began to preach. He called as his disciples, Peter and Andrew to be fishers of men. He also called James and John who were mending nets with their father so from the height of temptation he came down to the world of reality and began his ministry

We turn next to the Sermon on the Mount which was the sermon of teaching and preparation. His preparation for this wonderful experience was somewhat different than the previous preparation because he spent his time healing the sick and teaching and preaching and the result was multitudes began to gather and follow him. He went up into the mountain and opened his mouth and taught them. From this experience came the greatest sermon ever preached, the greatest love lesson ever taught, the greatest degrees ever confirmed. He explained who are the blessed. The disciples were called salt of the earth, light of the world and Christ urged them to be a good example, also he spoke of alms, prayer, forgiveness, our treasures and the difference between God and Mammon.

He also spoke reprovably about making rash judgments and proper treatment of holy things. spoke about how narrow is the strait gate. He spoke about prayer.

This Sermon on the Mount contained the whole life and teachings of the preacher and he spoke to living persons 1900 years ago and it is still up-to-date and applicable today.

Now where did Christ go from this immeasurable height? He came down and behold there was a leper. The utter repulsiveness of this ulcerated creature, cast out as unclean from society. From the heights to the depths of reality. Jesus put forth his hand and heals the leper. He healed the centurion's servant and made him well and also brought health to Peter's mother-in-law.

Jesus prepared for the next height by extending his ministry. He went about preaching and healing and finished choosing his disciples saying if any man

will come after me let him deny himself take up his cross and follow me. After six days he took Peter, James and John, his brother and they went up into the height of transfiguration. As he prayed there a light shined on him as a ray from the sun and he associated with Moses and Elias, ancient prophets, who brought God's word of acknowledgement. It made a deep impression on the disciples. From that height he came down with his disciples and his first contact with reality was with the man whose son was filled with evil spirits and was an epileptic. He cured that son. He was approached about taxes and he set an example by taking a coin which had been taken from the mouth of a fish and noting Caesars' image on the coin said one must pay tribute to the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's.

Once again Jesus prepares to mount the heights in anticipation of the depth to follow. The next holy experience is growing closer to the end of his life and his supreme sacrifice he prepared to observe the Passover with his disciples and during that meal he took bread and he blessed saying that this is my body and he took a cup and gave it to them saying that this is my blood. He had made the decision to make the supreme sacrifice and he was preparing them to climb to the heights with him to ultimately receive the same fate.

The Heights were to be his Gethsemane from there he would go to the disgrace of the cross and an inhumane death. There he would be deeply in prayer. He will wrestle with his human condition and finally except that he must make the supreme sacrifice saying to his Father in heaven, "Not my will be done but thine be done."

From such a trying and sacrificial experience he would come down to the lowest depths of reality, this was to be a betrayal by one of his own disciples. He was to face trial and judgment which would result in his crucifixion. What a contrast from that heavenly experience of talking with his father and then come down to be betrayed, tried, condemned and crucified. His last and final climb to the height was the height of his ascension. What more preparation did he need, he had already lived a full life preaching and bearing witness, healing and setting an example, as well as passing on his works and deeds and laying out a plan of salvation for everyone. In his ascension he blessed his disciples and then ascended to the supreme heights to join with his Father as the son of God. But there is still a great reality which he left behind for his disciples and for all of us who follow him to go out into all the world and preach the gospel to every living creature.

The reality is in repentance and baptism. For us the reality is that we have a chance to hear and accept the gospel message. Have you ever wondered why life is. Have you ever wondered what sort of life to live. Jesus gave us a reason to live. He showed us a life worth living. if you would find out, place yourself at his command and come forward this day to knowledge and accept him as your guide through the rest of your life.